

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 3

H. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Human Sexuality: Three Key Issues

Background Paper

This document was prepared by the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) at the request of the College of Bishops for the guidance of the Church. Adopted 10 October 2014.

The CTICR has published a shorter version of this Human Sexuality paper which is available under the Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions (DSTO) section of the LCA website <http://www.lca.org.au/departments/commissions/cticr/>

A bible study series on the topic for use in congregations is available on the Study Guides page of the LCA website <http://www.lca.org.au/services-resources-training/study-guides/>

1. PREFACE	3
2. HUMANS AS SEXUAL BEINGS	4
3. MARRIAGE	5
3.1 God's good creation	5
3.2 A gift of God's love.....	6
3.3 Arena for bearing children	7
3.4 Primary arena for the married to fulfil their Christian calling	7
3.5 Unfaithfulness in marriage and divorce	8
3.6 Cohabitation and de facto relationships.....	8
3.7 Same sex marriage and civil legislation.....	9
3.8 Summary and conclusion.....	10
4. BEING SINGLE	11
4.1 Being single is pleasing to God	11
4.2 The vocation of being single.....	11

4.3 Being single and sex	12
4.4 Being single, loneliness and community	13
4.5 Single parents	13
4.6 Responding to God's call to the life of celibacy.....	14
4.7 Being single and homosexuality	15
4.8 Summary and conclusion.....	16
5. HOMOSEXUALITY	17
5.1 Current context.....	17
5.2 Sexual orientation.....	18
5.3 Biblical hermeneutics.....	19
5.4 The Bible and homosexuality	21
5.5 Biblical texts	22
5.5.1 Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13	22
5.5.2 Romans 1:18–32.....	27
5.5.3 1 Corinthians 6:9–11	32
5.5.4 1 Timothy 1:8–11	35
5.6 Rereading the texts and the tradition	37
5.7 Conclusion and pastoral care.....	40

1. PREFACE

This paper forms the response of the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) to a request from the College of Bishops, that the commission undertake a comprehensive study of the topic of human sexuality. An early draft of the paper was presented to the 2010 General Pastors' Conference in Melbourne and a revised draft to the 2013 General Pastors' Conference in Adelaide. The paper has now been finalised as a study document for the Church, following ongoing discussion at subsequent District Pastors' Conferences and extensive feedback from individual pastors and other members of the Church. The CTICR has decided also to provide an abridged version of the paper, for placement on the LCA website. Together, the two documents replace the Church's 1975 statement on homosexuality.¹

Marked changes in community attitudes and civil legislation make it essential that the Church² clarify its teaching on human sexuality and provide sound pastoral guidance for its members. First and foremost, this paper spells out a Lutheran theology of sexuality and marriage. Then it thinks through the implications of our theology for divorce, remarriage after divorce, cohabitation, de facto relationships and equal (same sex) marriage. Next, the paper focuses on the issues associated with being single, highlighting the avenues of service being single opens up for those who embrace their being single as a unique calling and those who go further and regard their being single as a special gift of God.³

In the main section of the paper, the commission reflects on the far greater public acceptance of homosexuality today, both outside and inside the church, and it addresses homosexuality in the light of the biblical evidence. After extensive discussion the CTICR reaffirms the Church's historic teaching on homosexuality, while at the same time recommending appropriate and loving pastoral care for those who identify as homosexual.

The LCA's 1975 statement on homosexuality could assume consensus concerning the historic position of the church, that homosexual behaviour cannot be condoned because of the scriptural prohibitions. We now need to acknowledge the existence of a range of positions within the global Christian community, the global Lutheran community and within the LCA. It also must be said that members of the Church have expressed concern that the tone of the 1975 statement was not as pastoral as a statement needs to be in today's changed social context. The section of the paper that deals with homosexuality concludes with pastoral guidance, for the whole Church, for those who identify as homosexuals, and for their families, friends and pastoral supporters.

The desired outcome is a theological statement with pastoral considerations that will speak helpfully to our Church and society at this time.

¹ 'Homosexuality', in *Doctrinal statements and theological opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, DSTO

² Throughout the document, 'Church' indicates the Lutheran Church of Australia, and 'church' the wider church.

³ The CTICR readily admits that the paper's focus on three items only—marriage, being single and homosexuality—means that significant areas have not been addressed, such as the increasing sexualisation of the young, pornography, and paedophilia, to mention only three. These and other social realities of the 21st century deserve extensive, separate investigation and considered theological and pastoral reflection. Furthermore, the emphasis on homosexuality comes from the fact that the document initially arose from the widespread desire to update the 1975 statement on homosexuality.

2. HUMANS AS SEXUAL BEINGS

Sexuality is one of God's good gifts to humanity. Since God made humans as male and female (Gen 1:26), we are by nature sexual beings. Those who believe in Jesus Christ also understand that their body is the temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19,20), so we are also spiritual beings. Therefore whatever is done in the body, including our sexual conduct, has profound spiritual dimensions. The fact that God created humanity as male and female means that sexuality is woven into the fabric of humanity. Issues surrounding sexuality affect people deeply, so the potential for harm is great. Therefore it is necessary that we keep listening to and being formed by the scriptures as we discuss these issues.

Our sexual nature is not the only aspect of being human; it is not even the most important aspect. It also needs to be understood that sexuality extends far beyond merely 'having sex', and it involves far more than just our bodies. The sexuality of the whole person is a function of human embodiment, but it is not just about the body. Sexuality includes emotional, intellectual, spiritual, relational, moral and physical aspects.

The fact that relatedness is such a vital part of human nature has profound implications for sexuality. Genesis emphasises that humanity is made in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27). The image of God in humanity has both individual and community dimensions, not easily distinguished. For each individual—but also for the human community at large—the image consists of human dominion over other living creatures, the inherent knowledge of God among all peoples and the instinct to worship, and the gift of the conscience, the inbuilt sense of what is right and wrong (see Gen 9:6; Rom 1:19,20; Jam 3:9). The image also has an explicitly communal expression. The God who said, 'Let us make humanity in our image' (Gen 1:26), has ensured that the inner-Trinitarian community of love is reflected in the relationship between men and women in the world at large, and in particular in the loving relationship of husband and wife in marriage. Furthermore, God's creative power is enacted marvellously in human fruitfulness, God's gift of child-bearing to those joined in marriage, another vital dimension of the image of God in humans (Gen 1:28).

These conclusions have implications for the life of human sexuality. Our sexuality is not primarily focused on ourselves—on our pleasure or on our fulfilment. Our nature as sexual beings is a good gift from the loving creator God, to be enacted as we have been instructed by his word, for our good, and for the good of others.

It is also necessary to recognise that just as the whole of creation and the human family is affected by the fall, so also sexuality is subject to the distortion of sin. Sexuality is subject to the abnormal normality of the fall, so we can expect that all people will struggle with issues in the area of sexuality. We look in faith and hope to the salvation won for us in Jesus in whom we can be restored to our intended sexuality. We pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to live as in God's presence, and we long for God's restoration of the creation.

3. MARRIAGE

3.1 God's good creation

Lutherans understand that marriage belongs to the realm of creation, not the realm of redemption; it belongs to the first article of the creed, not the second. Marriage is for people of all persuasions, not simply for Christians.⁴ After all, the blessings conferred by marriage come from a God who 'makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Matt 5:45). God gives the good gifts of creation to his children for their blessing and protection. And the giver comes with the gift, disguised to those who don't have the eyes of faith to see behind the gift to the giver. Marriage is one of the guises in which God comes to bless humanity. Other guises include government, commerce, industry, the vocations in which people are engaged, and the orders of the natural world. By these means God cares for people, provides for them and protects them from harm and danger.

As the gift of marriage is unpacked, it is seen to consist of three major components, three surprise packets within the one package. They are

- life-long love and fidelity between husband and wife,
- the enjoyment of marital relations within the context sanctioned by God, and
- the privilege and challenge of bearing and raising children, if a couple receives the gift of children.

For the people of God in Christ Jesus, marriage is more than just a gracious provision of God in creation. Christian couples normally begin their marriage at the altar where they hear the word of God, make their vows to each other in the presence of God, pray together and are prayed for, and receive the blessing of God. Joined together by God, their union with each other is a union in Christ, a bond in the Spirit. This Christian dimension of Christian marriage is reflected in Ephesians 5 where the apostle describes marriage as an analogy of the bond between Christ and his bride, the church (vs 32). The self-giving love of Christ is the model for mutual submission and selfless love in marriage (vss 21–30). It is also in Christian marriage that husband and wife are to 'bear with one another and ... forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive' (Col 3:13). Even in marriages where one partner is not a believer, Christians can bring much blessing to marriage by their godly life and faithful prayers, which can win over the unbelieving spouse 'without a word' (1 Pet 3:1). Christian couples live out their marriage blessing by living together in faith and love, so that their marriage reflects the union of Christ with his bride the church.

As a divine order, as a creation of God, the institution of marriage already exists before couples marry. They enter a pre-existing estate. Their entry into the covenant of marriage (Prov 2:17) is signed and sealed by their vows, and it is confirmed by their promises of life-long fidelity.⁵ But marriage itself pre-exists any given couple who enter through its portals. This is another mark of God's love for marriage and those who marry. God has lovingly crafted marriage in such a way as to sustain the love of husband and wife. Their marriage is not jeopardised by fluctuations in their feelings of love towards one another, or by diminished desire. It is not their love that keeps the marriage bond intact but the marriage bond and the covenant of faithfulness that sustain their love.

⁴ The Catholic and Orthodox churches regard Christian marriage as one of the sacraments, largely on the basis of Ephesians 5:32, where Paul speaks of the relationship between husband and wife as an analogy of the relationship between Christ and the church, which Paul calls 'a great mystery'. The Vulgate translates the Greek word for mystery with the Latin word *sacramentum*, the basis for understanding marriage as a sacrament. Luther distanced himself from this position.

⁵ The Australian Marriage Act of 1961 (section 46:1) describes marriage as 'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'.

How can this be? As one of the orders of creation and therefore charged with the inherent powers of creation, marriage is highly therapeutic. Luther could go so far as to claim that the health benefits of marriage extended far beyond husbands and wives to whole communities. He said: 'The estate of marriage redounds to the benefit not alone of the body, property, honour, and soul of an individual, but also to the benefit of whole cities and countries, in that they remain exempt from the plagues imposed by God' (LW 45:44). And as it provides these wonderful gifts, it also protects those who enter it from the ravages of infidelity.

With this understanding it is right that the state, not the church, should be responsible for devising and revising laws that pertain to marriage, such as eligibility requirements, legal requirements for a valid marriage, property laws, child protection policies and regulations governing separation, divorce, remarriage and child custody.

But legality does not always equate with Christian morality. As in other areas, regulations concerning marriage undergo constant legislative adjustment with changes in social practices and public acceptance of matters previously frowned upon. As James Nestingen puts it: 'The law runs along behind on short legs, trying to keep up with all life's permutations and variations'.⁶ Christian couples do not conduct themselves simply according to the letter of the law of the land. Practices that enjoy wide public acceptance and in some cases have become legal may not be acceptable before God. Such practices may require Christians to take a stand, to beg to differ. Likewise, times of hurt and betrayal call for a forgiveness borne of Christ's forgiveness. The love and patience that Christians demonstrate in times of a spouse's sickness or disability or in other times of severe testing may far exceed what is required by the law of the land. Ideally, faith in Jesus will make a significant difference in a Christian marriage.

3.2 A gift of God's love

The Bible makes it clear that God has instituted marriage as a gift of love to his children. One's husband or wife is a specific gift of God. 'House and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord' (Prov 19:14). The account of the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4-25) provides the main basis for the church's understanding of marriage. There we read that God takes the rib from the sleeping man's own flesh, lovingly builds it into the woman, brings her to him, and steps aside to watch the man and the woman receive one another and take full delight in each other. They derive from each other, and they are intended for each other (1 Cor 11:11,12). By means of the successive steps recounted in these pivotal verses, the institution of marriage is created.

Marriage as God's good will and his good work is also based on Genesis 1:26-31. Built into the very fabric of creation, God declares that marriage is very good (Gen 1:31). Then, God 'puts it in safe-keeping and protects it'⁷ by providing the sixth commandment: 'You shall not commit adultery' (Ex 20:14). Man and woman equally are made in God's image (Gen 1:26-28), and their complementary shape, size and features are precisely as God willed it and worked it, for their happiness and fulfilment in marriage. 'Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts satisfy you at all times; may you be intoxicated always by her love' (Prov 5:18,19). Ideally, marital love will include a generous mixture of the three main kinds of love: sensual desire (*eros*), friendship (*philia*) and self-forgetting service (*agāpē*).

A full appreciation of one's marriage and one's spouse as a gift of God's love provides the sure recipe for staying in love. A partner's sickness or disability, or troubles that may arise, have the potential to put a strain on the marriage relationship. Similarly, it is human nature

⁶ 'Luther on marriage, vocation and the cross', *Word and World* 23/1 (Winter) 2003, page 36.

⁷ *Luther's Large Catechism* (1529-1530), translated by Friedemann Hebart, Lutheran Publishing House, page 71.

to focus on a spouse's faults and foibles as time passes; it is human nature to think that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. But, to paraphrase Luther, if a married man has learnt the art of looking at his wife correctly, according to the beauty and the adornment with which God has clothed her for him, and if a married woman has learnt the same art in relation to her husband, nobody else will ever appear to be more beautiful than their spouse (LW 21:88). A husband who regards his wife as God's gift to him will take unceasing delight in this precious gift, will not be deflected from his commitment to her no matter how attractive another woman might be in worldly terms and no matter how troublesome his wife's conduct or condition. The same thing will apply to a wife in relation to her husband. Practising a proper theology of marriage keeps the spark of true love alive, come what may.

3.3 Arena for bearing children

A third pillar of a biblical understanding of marriage derives from the divine command to humanity, 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28). It is noteworthy that Luther regarded marriage as compulsory, with very few exceptions. In his day the church placed a higher value on vows of celibacy than on marriage; in fact, there was a widespread tendency to despise marriage and scorn those who married. Luther protested by saying that marriage had God's command and enjoyed God's blessing, whereas the monastic vow of celibacy was a human work. God didn't command it or bless it.⁸

Luther noted that the power of reproduction is a gift that God has incorporated into the construction of humans, into their very being. They have been charged by God, in two senses of the word—charged in the sense of commanded by God to be fruitful and multiply, and hence to marry, and charged in the greater sense of empowered by God. Charged just as one charges a battery, humans have been created in order to bring forth offspring.

The blessing of procreation is God's gift to all of humankind. The charge to be fruitful and multiply is found in Genesis 1 where it is addressed to humanity as a whole, not to every individual person. Those who can't get married, for any one of a number of good reasons, and those who decide not to marry, for any one of a number of good reasons, should not feel that they are under orders from God to get married.⁹ But people who are single, especially those who are single again, often find themselves on the outer in church circles. To be married and have a family is regarded as normal, and preferable before God. But the fact is that more than fifty percent of the Australian and New Zealand population above the age of 15 are single. And the proportion of the population that is widowed, divorced or remain unmarried is growing, not declining. Fortunately, the church is improving in its ministry to singles as it learns that being single is just as much a Christian vocation as being married.

3.4 Primary arena for the married to fulfil their Christian calling

Christians are called to the life of service, and few arenas provide greater opportunities for putting others first than one's marriage. This is especially so if one's spouse behaves badly or is sick, disfigured or disabled. Rather than fleeing from this difficult place, and abandoning their spouse, the Christian husband or wife will seek God's help to

⁸ It is interesting to note that Confessions state that the gift of virginity 'surpasses marriage', on the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:32–35 (Apology to the Augsburg Confession 23, 38–40; *The Book of Concord*, Tappert: 244,45).

⁹ Luther reacted to the over-valuing of celibacy and the widespread disregard for marriage in his day by allowing few exceptions to the command to marry. In his discussion of the sixth commandment in the Large Catechism, drawing on Matthew 19:12, he wrote: 'These [exceptional special cases] are the ones who are not suited to married life, or whom God has released from marriage by giving them a unique gift from heaven so that they can remain pure outside marriage' (LC I, 211; Hebart: 72). If Luther's views are read independently of his social and historical setting they could be quite hurtful for the growing number of people who, for good reasons, don't or can't marry.

demonstrate patience and courage and provide all the help, healing and support that the circumstances require. In doing so they will 'have peace in grief, joy in the midst of bitterness, happiness in the midst of tribulations, as the martyrs have in sufferings' (LW 45:39). Similarly, when wronged by their spouse, Christians will name the wrong-doing in love and walk the path that leads by way of forgiveness to reconciliation and understanding.

As parents, Christian husbands and wives will happily care for their children in ways that seem foolish and demeaning in comparison with the grander pursuits of the church and the wider community. They know that these humble domestic chores mirror more directly than most chores the providing and protecting, the caring and nurturing, that God the creator and loving parent of all performs constantly on behalf of his beloved children.

3.5 Unfaithfulness in marriage and divorce

God's good gift of marriage is protected by the commandment forbidding adultery (Ex 20:14), and those who have made marriage vows are expected to stay faithful to their spouse until death separates them. The pattern for the kingdom is 'what God has joined together, let no one separate' (Matt 19:6). Even though Christians know that God's intention for marriage is that it be lifelong, marriages break down and some Christians get divorced. Even though the New Testament permits divorce on certain grounds (Matt 5:32; 19:9; see also 1 Cor 7:15), God's will is most fully lived out when couples stay married when their relationship becomes strained, and they live in repentance and forgiveness. The goal of pastoral counselling in such circumstances will not just be to prevent divorce but, where possible, to help couples be reconciled and come to fullness in all aspects of their marriage relationship. On the other hand, when marriages break down and divorce follows, it is vital that pastors and other care givers do their utmost to understand the pain and heartache that divorcees experience, by listening compassionately and non-judgmentally as they give voice to their anger and anguish, their guilt and their blaming. If the time should come that people seek to remarry after divorce, it is vital that they acknowledge the part they played in the marriage breakdown, repent, seek forgiveness, and deal responsibly with any outstanding issues arising from their previous marriage.¹⁰

3.6 Cohabitation and de facto relationships¹¹

Christians who live in cohabiting or de facto relationships may well argue that they have promised themselves to one another in a relationship of mutual love and faithfulness—and that's all that matters. Furthermore, they may say, marriages regularly break down, and therefore it's best not to make a life-long commitment to each other. Among other things, this attitude demonstrates a failure to appreciate the public nature of marriage and the state's legitimate role in regulating marriage and protecting those who enter into marriage.

The requirements of the Australian Marriage Act will determine whether or not a couple is married: formal notice of marriage which ensures that it is a matter of public concern and conforms to the laws of the land, solemnisation by an authorised celebrant, and the attestation of at least two adult witnesses.

With these things in mind, a Christian man and woman who want to live together will seek marriage, thereby giving a clear witness to the Church's teaching, placing their relationship under the protection of the state, and setting a good example to one and all.

¹⁰ See 'The attitude of the LCA to marriage, divorce and re-marriage' (DSTO H7-9).

¹¹ Additional reading: 'Marriage and de facto relationships', DSTO, H27,28; Friedemann Hebart, 'What is "marriage" today? Problems and perspectives', *Lutheran Theological Journal* 31/2 (Aug), 50-68; 'De facto relationships and teachers in Lutheran schools: biblical and theological foundations', a paper commissioned by the College of Presidents and adopted by General Church Council, April 1999.

The Church asks cohabiting unmarried couples, with those pastorally supporting them, to reflect on the precise nature of their relationship and seek to move into the full commitment of marriage, in accordance with the will of God. This will also provide an opportunity for the congregation and the couple's immediate communities to celebrate, bless, pray for and uphold their marriage.

3.7 Same sex marriage and civil legislation

Pressure is mounting for the state and federal parliaments of Australia to pass legislation for same sex marriage. New Zealand has already passed same sex marriage legislation.¹² Some advocates say that legislation that recognises civil unions is a necessary first step towards same sex marriage. Others say that civil unions are part of the problem. They cement discrimination in place and make it more difficult than ever to take the final step towards marriage equality for homosexuals, thereby perpetuating their second-class status. And still others say that the word 'marriage' is too closely associated with heterosexuality, and they would prefer a new term. However, the vast majority of homosexual rights advocates still prefer the word 'marriage' and describe the reluctance to introduce same sex marriage legislation as unfair and unfeeling, discriminatory and hurtful. Why shouldn't homosexual couples enjoy the same rights and privileges as heterosexual couples, they argue, the right to enjoy, proclaim and celebrate their love publicly? There is growing public acceptance of homosexual practice in general and same sex marriage in particular. As advocates of equality and models of compassion, some members of the church may well be among the first to welcome the move to so-called marriage equality for homosexuals, especially if those seeking it are family members or friends.

Without abandoning pastoral care considerations, members of the LCA are encouraged to ask some basic theological questions which will then become foundational for true pastoral care. In this case, the questions will revolve around the Lutheran understanding of marriage, rather than the discussion of homosexuality per se (section 5, below). Even though marriage's attendant rites and ceremonies may vary over time and from place to place, it still reaches back to its divine origins within creation. There God instituted marriage as the union between a man and a woman. While a same sex union may be based on romantic attraction, mutual affection and promises of long term commitment, it is not an estate given with creation and embedded in the fabric of society from time immemorial. Unlike the union of a man and a woman, it is not the natural arena for bringing children into the world and thereby perpetuating the human community. Theologically speaking, therefore, a same-sex union is not only contrary to God's design, but it does not have the fundamental features that give marriage its unique quality. To use the name 'marriage' for same-sex partnerships would be to use the same name for things that are fundamentally different.

The possible legalisation of same sex marriage in Australia and its actual legalisation in New Zealand raise the question of the Church's responsibility towards civil authority. The Church confesses that God has instituted civil authorities for the welfare of the members of society and for their protection from harm (Rom 13:1-4; see also AC 16.5). However, the Church also confesses that there is a limit to civil authority, and that limit is reached when the state enacts legislation that conflicts with the revealed will of God (Acts 5:29). From what has been said about same sex marriage (above) it follows that pastors would not solemnise the marriage of people of the same sex or recognise their marriage. If they were required to do so they would rather disobey the state and bear the consequences. The LCA will always welcome and seek out opportunities to become engaged in the discussion of legislation that affects the rights of homosexuals.

¹² The New Zealand Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act came into effect on 19 August 2013. It replaces the NZ Marriage Act of 1955. The statutory definition of marriage in the Act defines marriage as 'the union of two people, regardless of their sex, gender orientation, or gender identity'.

3.8 Summary and conclusion

God has provided humankind with marriage as a special gift of love. God has designed and crafted marriage for the pleasure and protection of those who marry, for life-long faithful companionship, for the perpetuation of the human family through the gift of children, and for the health and well-being of the community at large. God has built marriage into the very fabric of his created order and employs it to bless and enrich husband and wife as long as they live. Christians also understand marriage as an analogy of the self-giving love of Christ for his bride the church, the model and the motivation for the mutual love of husband and wife.

The definition of marriage, as far as the Church is concerned, conforms to God's intention as revealed in scripture. Therefore, the marriage of same sex couples cannot be recognised as marriage by the Church. The LCA acknowledges the right of the state to set up a register of civil unions between people of the same sex and to accord them legal recognition and rights, but it does object to calling such a union 'marriage' because marriage is ordered in a fundamentally different way.

4. BEING SINGLE

4.1 Being single is pleasing to God

St Paul and the Lutheran Confessions follow Jesus in teaching that being single is a good and God-pleasing state (Matt 19:10–12), superior even to marriage (1 Cor 7:6–8, 32–40; AC Apology 23,38). The Church will guard against the tendency to speak about marriage in a way that creates the impression that people should marry in order to please God, or as if it is the only good way of life.¹³ While a person is single the Bible teaches that they are to remain celibate. Jesus and Paul recognise that not many have the gift of celibacy (Matt 19:10–12; 1 Cor 7:7–9). Paul affirms that it is no sin to marry (1 Cor 7:28); indeed he calls the prohibition of marriage a doctrine of demons (1 Tim 4:1–3).¹⁴ The gift of celibacy, on the other hand, is a special talent from God, like the gifts of music or generosity or administration, to be recognised and embraced and used to God's glory for as long as a person remains single.

Both Jesus and Paul demonstrate that Christian singles have the opportunity to devote themselves to the things of God in ways that cannot be done by the person who has the worries and concerns that come from marriage. Jesus speaks of those who are unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matt 19:10–12), and Paul says that the unmarried are rightly anxious, or concerned, about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and mind (1 Cor 7:32–35). Far from being an excuse for avoiding self-giving love and service, being single may provide a rich opportunity for self-sacrificial service. A decision not to marry for the sake of the kingdom is to be applauded in those whom God has so gifted.

Being single is a normal state of human existence.¹⁵ Those who are married should remember that they were single once. People are single for any number of reasons. Some are single by choice and are happy to stay single. Some would rather be married but are resigned to their being single, foreseeing no prospect of marriage. As the opportunity to marry slips away, they may experience grief, including the grief of never having children. Most young Christian singles expect that they will marry one day. Many, usually not so young, whose marriage has ended in death or divorce, may still hold out hopes of marrying again once they have dealt with the issues associated with their previous marriage. Others who are single again may feel liberated and have no intention of remarrying, whereas others who had decided not to remarry have their mind changed through unforeseen circumstances.

Being single is a common feature of biblical stories. Isaac was single for forty years before he married Rebekah. Jeremiah was called to remain single. Ezekiel was single-again after the death of his wife, and Hosea was possibly single for a time due to desertion. Jesus was single throughout his life on earth. It seems likely that some of the women who travelled with Jesus to provide for him from their own resources would have been widows.

4.2 The vocation of being single

Despite the various ways that being single is experienced, there are some common factors. Christians who are single should be aware of themselves as people who bear the image of God, who are called into relationship with God through their creation, their

¹³ See footnote 7, page 6.

¹⁴ Speaking of monastic vows, the Lutheran Confessions assert that the vow of celibacy is not binding in cases where the gift of celibacy has not been given by God (Apology AC, 23 and 27).

¹⁵ There are increasing numbers of singles in Australia, and presumably also in New Zealand. In Australia in 2010 the median age for men to marry was 29.6 years, compared to 26.5 years in 1990. For women the age has gone up from 24.3 to 27.9. This statistic combines with the greater frequency of separation and divorce to increase considerably the number of singles in our community. See <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March+Quarter+2012#MARRIAGES> (last accessed 20 March 2013)

redemption and their sanctification. They have the great task of enjoying God's goodness and serving his purposes. Those who are called to be single, no matter how long the calling lasts, can expect to receive opportunities to serve God and their neighbour that are specific to their situation (AC Apology 27,49).

The relationships in which single people carry out their calling will embody the same virtues as a good marriage, but they will do so in a way that is different and specific to each relationship. Self-giving love, commitment, chastity, forgiveness, patience, honesty, justice, wisdom, humility, compassion and self-control are important virtues in any relationship. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22,23) are no less important in these relationships than in marriage. One must also remember that the common 'wedding text' on love (1 Cor 13) was actually not written specifically for married couples, but for the Christian community as a whole.¹⁶ Likewise, Ephesians 5:21–33, a key passage about marital relationships, is simply a particular example of the general point about how Christians should live in relationship: wise and filled with the Spirit, giving thanks to God and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:15–20).

4.3 Being single and sex

The most difficult temptation for most single people is the temptation posed by their sexual desires, which are not necessarily less potent because they are single. The duty of all Christians to lead chaste lives means that single Christians ought not engage in the sexual acts which God has designed for our relationships in the context of marriage (Eph 5:3–5, Col 3:5; 1 Cor 6:9–13). This means that single people do not have the remedy for sin that marriage provides. Jesus assumes that those who are unmarried lead a celibate life (Matt 19:12). However, in our highly sexualised society it is widely assumed that singles are not celibate. It is expected that people have sex early and often, on the first date, before the first date, or even without ever proceeding to a first date. This means that those who understand it is God's will that they remain celibate before marriage and outside of marriage may be subject to the pity, bewilderment or even ridicule of their peers. The Church needs to be a place that affirms and supports those who have chosen this seemingly harder path.

Singles can sometimes face other forms of misunderstanding around the community expectation that it is normal to marry. Not all singles necessarily appreciate well-meaning attempts to match up their single family member or friend. Offering assistance and advice in finding a spouse is often a delicate topic that can exacerbate the challenges of the single life; but conversely, it might be appreciated. The confidence and honesty of a Christian mentoring relationship¹⁷ can be an appropriate context in which sensitive topics can be discussed.

Some singles will try to steer a clear course towards finding a suitable spouse. Some will not be so proactive and simply hope and pray that they will find the right person. As opportunities for starting a relationship arise, singles will be careful to observe proper boundaries. They will seek to grow in the intellectual, spiritual and emotional dimensions of their relationship, fully conscious that sexuality is about more than sexual acts and always alert to the challenge to control their desires (1 Thess 4:3–8).

¹⁶ The words of another favourite wedding text, Ruth 1:16,17, are also not the words of a husband to his wife, or a wife to her husband. Rather, Ruth is speaking of her abiding love for her mother-in-law Naomi.

¹⁷ In view of the increasing sexualisation of the young it is more important than ever that congregations rethink the matter of providing mentors for young singles, whether the mentors are single or married. Mentors will show sensitivity and Godly wisdom towards the young person in the joys and struggles of being single, so that they can safely, honestly and prayerfully discuss issues of dating, celibacy and marriage.

4.4 Being single, loneliness and community

Dealing with the loneliness of not being married is the greatest challenge faced by some singles (Gen 2:18). Having someone to talk over what has happened during the day is not always possible. Going out without a partner—to dinner, to a concert, to a party, even to church—can be a constant challenge. Single people see other people taking holidays with their spouse. Singles don't always have someone on hand to share the housework, or someone to receive sympathy from and run errands during a time of sickness. Singles may have to make a special effort to have their need for intimacy met—their need for a hug, a pat on the back, or just someone to hold their hand. Singles don't so readily have at hand people to share their joys and sorrows and frustrations, or people to help them work through difficult issues that they may be facing. Older singles don't have children or grandchildren to watch and guide and take pleasure in as they grow up and pass through life's varied stages. With whom do they share their memories? To whom do they pass on their treasures? Who sits by their death bed? Ministry to singles should be a top priority in the life of every congregation.

Singles are social creatures, like everyone else, with the need to live in community. It can be hard for singles to find appropriate and life-giving relationships; it is a challenge for the Church to identify and address this vital need. The Bible provides many examples of non-marital relationships, and it speaks of the intimacy and value they have for the single person. Jesus called his disciples his friends (John 15:13–15), and it is clear that he had a special affection for one of his friends in particular, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7,20). He developed strong relationships with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He also provided a non-family relationship between the disciple he loved and his mother (John 19:26). David and Jonathon were so linked that their souls were said to have been knit to each other (1 Sam 18–20, especially 18:1–3; 20:41,42). Paul considered Timothy and Titus his 'sons' (Phil 2:22; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2,18; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4).

It is clear, then, that singles and married couples must play a vital role in helping one another. Single people support and uphold marriages by their example of chaste living and personal encouragement of spouses to stay faithful to one another. They can also help couples meet some of the non-sexual relational needs that are not necessarily met within marriage. Married couples, likewise, must give an example of legitimate Christian sexuality by their behaviour, and they can use their relationship as a secure base from which to offer Christian hospitality and fellowship to those who are single. The mutual conversation and consolation of the saints is not limited by marital status.

4.5 Single parents

If the church has a special ministry to singles, it has an extra special ministry to single parents. Through death or divorce, either the husband or the wife is left with full responsibility for the child or children of the marriage. In addition to the profound grief and distress the sole parent experiences through the loss of their spouse—even in the case of an unhappy marriage—they face hardship in every area of life. In most cases they are financially worse off than previously, and suddenly all the responsibilities for child-rearing, to say nothing for continuing to maintain home and garden, fall on their shoulders, so that they find little relief from the constant demands on their time and energy and emotional reserves. The compromises that sole parents are forced to make—moving into cheaper housing, changing schools, cutting down on gifts, clothes and outings, returning to the work-force or working longer hours—can take a heavy toll on the physical, emotional and spiritual state of single parents, especially if they have to watch their children suffer. Paul's admonition to the church that its members 'bear one another's burdens' and in that way 'fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2) is particularly apt in such circumstances.

4.6 Responding to God's call to the life of celibacy

From the time of the Reformation, religious orders with their vow of celibacy no longer figure prominently in the life of the Lutheran church. However, it cannot be denied that the church has always had members who have not only sensed God's call to a life of celibacy but who also believe they have been given the gift and would like to practise it more intentionally. They recognise the biblical truth that dignity and personhood derive from the relationship with God first and foremost, and without responsibilities for a spouse and children they understand that they have more time and energy for a life of service and for the disciplines of Bible study, prayer, meditation, reading and reflection.

It must be admitted that our Church lacks the institutional setting and the widespread understanding and appreciation that are needed to support and nurture those who have sensed this calling and embraced this gift. Such people are often urged to marry; their sexual orientation may be called into question. Those who have received the calling then enter their chosen vocation silently and secretly, without an induction or the Church's formal blessing. Instead they are left to sense the disappointment of friends and family alike, even their disapproval. There is little appreciation that their being single and celibate represents a freely chosen option—to lead their life without the joys and challenges of marriage and instead to embrace the joys, challenges and opportunities for service of being single.

Whereas such intentionally celibate people may sometimes be regarded as second-class citizens within the Church, Jesus accords them high honours by speaking of them as signs of the kingdom. He commends them for their willingness to embark on their calling 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven', and immediately shows that he knows that people will find such a calling hard to deal with: 'Let anyone accept this who can' (Matt 19:12).

Marriage may have its allotted place in the present age, but those with the gift of celibacy serve as a wonderful sign of the life to come, eternal life. As Jesus said, in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven' (Matt 22:30, Mark 12:25). This biblical truth doesn't receive a great deal of attention these days. But it is good to be reminded of the fact that marriage is only of penultimate importance, whereas our relationship with God is of ultimate importance, and that God's love far exceeds marital love and forever outlasts it. Those who have committed themselves to the single life bear constant witness to these incontrovertible truths. Paul said that singles are 'concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit' (1 Cor 7:34). As people whose heart is set on their heavenly home and their heavenly Father, they don't compartmentalise their time between the Lord's and their own. Rather they read and study and pray and pay attention to employing their time, energy and resources in such a way that the Lord's service is their sole occupation.

At other times and in other churches the gift of celibacy has been and still is held in far higher esteem than in our circles. In the LCA the blessings of family life are often regarded as the ideal, to the anguish of the significant proportion of each congregation that doesn't belong to a family unit—a happily married couple and one, two or three smiling children. It is a good thing that we honour those who have chosen the life of celibacy in our midst. Of such people Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life' (Luke 18:29). A reminder of this kind of honour might also do wonders for those who would rather not be single and celibate; they may grow to embrace the single life intentionally, and celebrate it as their God-given calling.

4.7 Being single and homosexuality

The Church's teaching on homosexual practice (section 5, below) presents major challenges for those who identify as homosexuals. The teaching implies, in fact it requires, that they lead a life of being single and celibacy. It goes without saying that some Christians who identify as homosexuals willingly accept the Church's teaching and bear the cross that the Bible and their conscience assure them that they are called to bear. They lead the life of a single, they embrace the opportunities for service and human companionship that the single life provides, within their family, the church and the community, and they face the particular challenges of their circumstances and resist the temptations.

It is also important to realise that there are homosexual Christians who see the situation differently and to try to see things from their perspective. Convinced that same sex relationships are not wrong, they want to challenge the Church's teaching. They defend their position with arguments that may or may not meet with the agreement of friends, family and Church members. But they will certainly receive affirmation and encouragement from advocates of their stance, to say nothing for the voluminous literature written from a gay-friendly perspective. The most common starting point for this position is that love trumps the law. In fact, even when it comes to the law Jesus summarises it in terms of the two basic commandments, to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:37–40). So, it is asked, why shouldn't the neighbour-love spoken of by Jesus extend to the full expression of love between homosexuals? In addition, it is said, surely the jury is still out regarding the question whether the biblical writers knew of long-term homosexual relationships based on love and faithfulness. Is it possible that the writers only had promiscuous or abusive homosexual relationships in mind, such as male prostitution or sex with minors (pederasty)?

Those who adopt this viewpoint also ask about the Church's right to deprive its homosexual members of the pleasures of romance and dating. They speak of the cruelty of disallowing a loving long-term relationship that provides homosexual partners the gratification and mutual support that the Church happily grants to its heterosexual members within marriage. How can the Church require of its homosexual members the sexual abstinence and self-denial that are not required of the majority of its members? They ask, why should the gay community be asked to carry a burden totally disproportionate to the straight community? They may even claim that Jesus has said that sexual abstinence¹⁸ is a gift not given to everyone, and that as a gift it cannot be demanded of anyone (Matt 19:10,11). And they may go on to say that despite Jesus' call for self-denial (Mk 8:34,35) and the Spirit's gift of self-control (Gal 5:22,23), Paul also says that those who take the path of sexual abstinence may well find themselves 'afame with passion' (1 Cor 7:9), with harmful consequences for themselves and others (1 Cor 7:36–38). Paul is speaking of heterosexual relationships, of course, but homosexual Christians have often argued that Paul's words may be applied equally to them. No matter how graciously the Church seeks to counter these claims, the people in question, convinced of their stance, often lead lives of secrecy and shame within the Church, or they find a church that offers the support they are looking for, or they experience a crisis of faith and leave the church altogether.

As the Church grapples with the topic of homosexuality, it quickly becomes apparent that for many in the Church the discussion is far more than a matter of biblical and theological enquiry, but one that impinges on their humanity and their sexuality at the depths of their being. For those not so closely involved, it is a relatively straightforward matter to study the biblical evidence on the topic of homosexuality and make pronouncements. The texts

¹⁸ Understood biblically, celibacy has to do with giving up, voluntarily or involuntarily, something acknowledged as good and blessed by God, such as heterosexual marriage. Chastity, such as the sexual abstinence of a homosexual Christian, is abstaining from a behaviour that God has prohibited.

that deal with it are clear, the Church's theology is unambiguous. But the intersection of Bible, theology and pastoral practice is a difficult and highly contested space in the life of our Church and all other churches. The next section in this paper will focus on the issues that have been introduced in the immediately preceding paragraphs, and other issues that have arisen in the course of the broader discussion within the church at large. It will seek to address them in the light of the Bible and more broadly based ethical reflection; and it will propose pastoral guidance that the CTICR believes is true to the Bible. In doing so the paper will take seriously the case that some members of the Church make for another interpretation of the relevant texts and therefore another approach to pastoral care.

4.8 Summary and conclusion

A quick glance around the average Lutheran congregation on a Sunday morning will show even the most casual observer that a high proportion of worshippers are single, either by choice or due to circumstances of one kind or another. Some who do not marry or who are no longer married have happily embraced their single station in life. Others face significant difficulties that have been identified above (4.5–7), difficulties that apply to singles in society in general and in the Church in particular. The CTICR urges pastors and all Church members to develop a greater understanding of their circumstances, and ensure that they are not excluded from the communal life of the congregation. A conscious effort is required to guard against an inherent tendency to focus disproportionately on those who are married, and on the children and youth of the congregation. Special attention is required in the case of single parents, who are generally called to carry a far heavier workload than other parents who have two pairs of hands to bear the extraordinarily heavy physical, emotional, financial and time-consuming load of raising their children. Intentional assistance, provided consistently rather than spasmodically, would be a wonderful way for a congregation to bear the burdens of single parent fellow believers. This section of the document has also highlighted another matter that largely goes unremarked in the Church, that some people willingly forego the opportunity to marry because they have chosen to embrace the spiritual gift of celibacy in response to what they see as God's calling. Those who renounce the joys and challenges of marriage and raising their own family in order to dedicate their lives wholeheartedly to the service of God and others will rarely trumpet their intentions. But maybe it rests with the Church at large to identify those among us in those situations and to recognise them publicly and honour them for the role of Christ-like service that they play, with a blessing or even a commissioning.

5. HOMOSEXUALITY

5.1 Current context

Some Christians identify themselves as homosexual, reflecting the sexual diversity within the wider community. It is important that the Church be a place where people, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, experience a safe, welcoming environment where their Christian faith is nurtured. It is also important that pastoral care of homosexual Christians flow from the biblical witness concerning homosexuality.

A changing environment

Community standards and attitudes towards homosexuality in Australia and New Zealand have changed significantly in the past three or four decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, generally speaking, the community was opposed to homosexuality and its expression. Today, there is no longer any legislative prohibition against homosexuality in Australia or New Zealand, and same-sex relationships are increasingly accorded a range of legal rights and protections. Legislation also continues to undergo change in response to the trend towards 'marriage equality' that has developed largely in the Western world.

In the media non-heterosexual relationships of various forms have been portrayed in normalised and increasingly positive contexts. Many people growing up in this cultural climate have little sense that homosexual behaviour might even be wrong; for them it is simply the way things are.

In the past some homosexuals have kept their sexual identity hidden, for fear of rejection, discrimination or ridicule. There remains a strongly reactive element in our society that vilifies homosexuality and seeks to repress it, even with violence. But on the whole society today expects that homosexuality will be accepted, as a sign of tolerance.

This changed public context concerning homosexuality coincides with a sea-change in the private sphere for individuals and within families, where attitudes to homosexuality have softened considerably. Most people now know homosexual people. Parents are aware that their children or friends of their children may be same sex attracted or may have homosexual inclinations. This has caused profound struggles for many, despite the growing public acceptance of homosexuality.

Within the church

There is diversity amongst those people within our Church who identify as homosexual. Some have come to terms with their homosexuality and have concluded that they are to lead a celibate lifestyle. Some are in long term relationships and are quite comfortable with and open about their sexuality.¹⁹ For example, they may attend church and live in a family situation where their homosexuality is accepted, even though the family is quite conservative and traditional. Others may be less open, uncertain and even ashamed of their sexuality. Unfortunately, some homosexual people carry stories of shame, vilification and rejection. Others have attempted to change their sexuality in an effort to resolve the pain and contradiction they are experiencing, both within themselves and their communities.

There is also diversity in the way Church members respond to the fact that some members are homosexual. Many people within the Church, working from the scriptural prohibition

¹⁹ It is important to note that the greater acceptance of homosexual conduct within the church at large has emerged partly under the impetus of changed societal values and partly from interpretations of the Bible that have as their starting point the acceptance of same sex behaviour.

against homosexual conduct, wonder how to relate lovingly to a family member who has expressed homosexual inclinations or has come out as gay. Some Christians experience tension between their desire to accept and welcome homosexual people as children of God, and their belief that homosexual behaviour is contrary to the will of God. Some choose to suspend judgment.

In this highly charged environment it is essential that the Church never lose sight of the central message of the gospel. In the person of Jesus we see someone who models radical love. It is important that the congregations and ministries of the LCA are places where all Christians are welcome to worship and receive the means of grace. As we listen to what the scriptures say about human sexuality, it is vital that we do so with keen eyes, listening ears and pastoral hearts. Otherwise we run the risk of alienating those who experience same sex attraction and their family and friends.

5.2 Sexual orientation

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is one of the four components of sexuality and is evident in an emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to individuals of a particular sex. The three other components of sexuality are biological sex (whether we are born male or female), gender identity (whether we feel male or female), and social gender role (how we conform to what is regarded in our society as male or female behaviour).

Five chief forms of sexual orientation are commonly recognised: heterosexual (attraction to persons of the opposite sex), homosexual (attraction to persons of the same sex), bisexual (attraction to both sexes), transgendered (cross-gender identification and behavior), and intersex (having ambiguous genitalia). The non heterosexual orientations are commonly grouped under the acronym LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

The scientific community accepts that homosexuality and bisexuality are part of natural human diversity, making it inappropriate to speak of them as abnormal, as deviant, or as mental disorders. Rather, they are atypical in that they occur in a minority of people.

Most people start to become aware of their sexual orientation around the age of 10 years without any prior sexual experience. Most social scientists do not regard sexual orientation as a conscious choice that can easily be changed. At age 10 no-one chooses lifetime sexual orientation or lifestyle in any meaningful sense. While people do not choose their sexual orientation, they can of course choose the kind of life they want to live.

What causes sexual orientation?

Current scientific knowledge does not provide a clear answer to the question of causation. Whereas no single theory has emerged, most scientific studies now place greater emphasis on genetic factors such as neural circuitry laid down in early foetal development—rather than a ‘gay gene’. Others are more inclined to identify environmental factors, such as early sexual experience, poor parenting, family breakdown, sexual abuse, pornography, exclusion from same sex peer groups, or more generally the influence of a more tolerant society. Countering this are studies that show that the incidence of same-sex attraction is no greater today than in less ‘tolerant’ times. In the nature versus nurture debate many research studies appear unreliable because of

observer bias. Suffice to say, the relative roles played by genetic, biological, psychological and social factors have not been determined conclusively.²⁰

5.3 Biblical hermeneutics

Before studying the chief biblical texts that refer to homosexual activity, it is important to identify the Lutheran hermeneutical principles that are particularly relevant to the CTICR's deliberations on the topic of homosexuality. First and foremost, the commission is bound to the confession that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16), the only source and final authority for the teaching and practice of the church and the lives of Christians. The Old Testament and the New Testament are equally authoritative, shown by the way in which much of the New Testament's instruction in sexual ethics is based on the will of God as revealed in creation; that is, through natural law. Secondly, the commission is committed to the Reformation principle that the central message of the Bible is the gospel, the good news that God has reconciled believers to himself as an act of pure grace, solely through the atoning sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ. A clear distinction is maintained between the law and the gospel. Believers gain a profound appreciation of their need of the gospel as they examine their lives in the light of God's holy law. Released from the law's clutches in terms of its power to give life and salvation, they readily embrace God's law and keep it in the power of the Holy Spirit and with the support and encouragement of the believing community. And thirdly, especially pertinent to the study of ethical issues, the commission holds fast to the practice of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, so that clear and unambiguous passages are employed to interpret passages on the same topic that are not so straightforward.

The commission believes that in order to hear God speaking clearly through the Bible, it is vital that readers study it carefully. If understanding is to take place, readers will stand under the Word and read it humbly. In this way they will avoid the ever present tendency to look for texts that support what they already believe. Bible readers will avoid the human tendency to interpret texts out of context. They will be eager to discover how the passage they are studying fits within the book in which it is found, recognising that the passage is part of a larger literary whole. They will also acknowledge that the Bible employs a vast array of literary forms which must be clearly identified to ensure accurate interpretation. Also, its writers are addressing living communities of faith, whose faith questions, concerns and failings are not always immediately discernible. This means that readers will ask questions about the text's literary form, its historical location and the specific theological and pastoral issues that the author is addressing. Alert to the fact that the Bible is written in languages that are no longer spoken and at a time far removed from the present, the commission has done its level best not to jump to premature conclusions about the meaning of texts. We have tried to develop the habit of attending to the text carefully, so that it continues to inform our mindset and confirm or transform our viewpoint.

In order to wrestle more systematically with difficult ethical issues, biblical scholars have attempted to develop a number of criteria to help the church determine which commands remain universally applicable and which commands apply to a specific context in the life of God's community.²¹ Such criteria are best formulated in conversation with as many well-informed people as possible, to minimise the inevitable subjectivity that is inherent in formulating and prioritising the criteria. But even with the best intentions of participants, it remains a fraught endeavour. Nevertheless, the commission has operated mainly with the following criteria.

²⁰ The general term for attempts to change the orientation of homosexuals and bisexuals to heterosexual through the application of various therapies—medical, behavioural or spiritual—is 'sexual reorientation therapy' (SRT). Such therapies are based on the belief that homosexuals can be 'cured' or 'healed'. Evaluating the outcomes of such therapies is beyond the purview of this paper. However, there can be little doubt that observer bias plays a major role in research findings.

²¹ The criteria are applied explicitly in the discussion of the Leviticus texts (below, pages 22–27).

1. **Natural law.** Is the Old Testament prohibition of homosexuality in accordance with natural law, the way that God has ordered his creation?
2. **The law-gospel distinction.** The chief purpose of the law, according to Scripture and the Confessions, is to convict people of sin by repeatedly showing that fulfilling the law by their own efforts is simply not possible. So the law drives believers to the foot of the cross to find in Christ their only salvation, to discover the gospel. At its simplest and purest, the gospel consists of God's gracious declaration that sinful human beings are righteous before him through faith in Jesus Christ. At its heart, the gospel consists of the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. As for the law that convicts, that same law is never devoid of content. It also reveals God's will for the Christian life. God's law is good and it is good for believers. It is one of the means by which God blesses Christ's followers. It is not meant to be a burden but a delight (Psalm 1:1,2). It promotes human life and flourishing (Rom 7:9). If 'what is ordered to life' becomes death to us, the problem is not with the law but with us. We need to be delivered from the sin that dwells in us and takes the commandment as the occasion to bring about our death (Rom 7:11). Whatever it means to be 'free from the law', therefore, it cannot mean freedom from the unchanging and holy will of the creator. That would mean freedom from our good, freedom from life. Although the law was given to us for our benefit, it cannot deliver because of sin. Therefore, God in Christ accomplishes what the law could not accomplish: the fulfilment in us of what the law righteously demands (Rom 8:4). Although powerless to enact it in us because of our sinful flesh, the law sets out God's good will. And the Holy Spirit empowers believers to do God's good and perfect will as set out in the commandments.
3. **Correspondence between items.** Does that which is prohibited in the Bible correspond accurately with what is widely known about homosexual relationships today? This question arises particularly in connection with the question whether the biblical writers were aware of what is today described as loving long-term homosexual relationships between consenting adults. It also comes to the fore as scholars explore the way that the chief words that have featured in the discussion would have been understood in the social setting of the biblical era. Does exhaustive study of Greco-Roman society of the first century AD lead the church to such new insights into 'what Paul really meant' that the plain sense of the text has to give way to the latest findings of scholarship?
4. **The nature of the command.** Are the commands formulated in such a way as to indicate that they are absolute, that they apply to everyone, and that they are to endure throughout time? Or do contextual considerations require that readers work hard to determine how the commands applied at the time of writing and how they are to be applied most accurately and appropriately today.
5. **Scripture interprets scripture.** Where commands are not as clear as one would wish, they are interpreted in the light of commands found elsewhere in the Bible that deal with the same matter.
6. **The words of Jesus and the apostles.** A sound way of determining whether a biblical command is universally binding is to note whether Jesus and the apostles regard it as binding. By that measure Jewish food laws are abolished, but not the prohibitions against homosexual behaviour.

As helpful as these guidelines may be when people sit down to study a topic in a more or less neutral setting, the sad fact remains that people tend to take one of two positions when the discussion of homosexuality arises. Their last thought is to determine objective criteria as basis for a disinterested investigation.

One position is adopted by those who believe that the biblical prohibitions are outmoded or that they have not been interpreted and applied accurately throughout church history. People with this view may have entered the discussion in order to support a gay family member or friend. They believe that the church's call for homosexuals to remain celibate is insensitive, uncaring and judgmental, and it has led to widespread pastoral neglect, crises of faith, and alienation from the church community. They, or their mentors, engage in biblical and sociological research with the intention of entering and understanding the biblical world as thoroughly as possible, but also with a predisposition to find that the Bible isn't as clear as it appears on the surface—or if it is, that it addresses different situations than those that the church faces today. So the point deserves repeating. People who take this line are engaged in serious study of the Bible; if not, they rely on the writings of those who are. The dismissive term 'hermeneutics of suspicion' is far too readily applied to their research endeavours. They are eager, finally, to have the church change its traditional stance, lift the taboos that have surrounded homosexual behaviour by saying yes to committed relationships, and warmly welcome openly gay couples into the community, with little further admonition than an encouragement to remain faithful. The over-arching concern, from this perspective, is Jesus' command to love the neighbour, followed by the example that Jesus set in reaching out with grace and acceptance to those who experienced rejection at the hands of the religious community.

The other position is the conviction that both Testaments of the Bible prohibit homosexual activity, and the Church must observe the prohibition in its teaching and practice. This is the position of the LCA. The Bible teaches that sexual intercourse is reserved for heterosexual couples within marriage. This is presupposed by the Genesis accounts of creation and confirmed by the prohibitions that simply cannot be bypassed, even when subjected to the most rigorous word studies, sociological research findings, or new scientific understandings of homosexual causation, identity and practice. It is also important to acknowledge that the prohibition has remained virtually unchallenged throughout church history, until recent times.

The divergence between these two positions creates a major challenge for the LCA as the discussion goes forward. It is essential that members engage in open and honest conversation with those who do not share their point of view on the matter before us, praying constantly for the Spirit's gifts of faith and hope and love.

5.4 The Bible and homosexuality

It has long been noted that the biblical texts that refer to homosexuality are unanimous in saying that sexual relations between members of the same sex are contrary to the will of God. There are eight texts that deal with the topic. They are usually placed in four groups: (1) Genesis 19:1–9, Judges 19:22–25 and Jude 7, (2) Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, (3) Romans 1:18–32, and (4) I Corinthians 6:9–11 and 1 Timothy 1:8–11.²²

The stories told in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are not usually employed in discussions of homosexuality in the churches.²³ Genesis 19 gives the horrifying account of a failed attempt by the men of Sodom to rape angels in the guise of men, visitors to the home of Lot. The incident is best described as homosexual gang rape, with all its associations of lust and violence. Jude 7 is a clear reference to this episode. The story in Judges 19 is similar, but brutal and offensive in the extreme. The intended victim of the assault is a Levite who is spending the night in the village of Gibeah. To steer the sexually aroused men away from his male guest, however, the host offers them his own daughter and the Levite's concubine, to do with them whatever they desire.

²² Despite the similarities between the vice lists in 1 Cor 6:9–11 and 1 Tim 1:8–11, each warrants independent analysis to do justice to its distinctive emphases.

²³ After some discussion, the CTICR decided not to do an exegesis of the two stories, partly for the reasons given on this page, and partly because a detailed account of two lengthy stories would take us too far afield.

Some scholars question the relevance of such stories to the topic of homosexuality. First, the stories have to do with the sexual violence of men in general, towards men and women alike, where most of the perpetrators were probably not homosexuals. Male on male sexual brutality is also known to be a regular feature of life in prison. The vicious conduct is not engaged in to achieve sexual gratification so much as to degrade and humiliate victims and assert control over them. Secondly, both stories have to do more with the breach of the regulations governing hospitality in the biblical era than with homosexuality per se.²⁴ And thirdly, the Sodom of the Old Testament is elsewhere denounced for its idolatry, its empty religious practice, and its failure to show justice to the poor and needy (Ez 16:49,50; see also Isa 1:10–17; 3:9–15). On the other hand, arising from Genesis 19 and the reference to the sexual depravity of the inhabitants of Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities in verse 7 of Jude, the words ‘sodomy’ and ‘sodomite’ have become associated with sexual activity that is regarded as unnatural or perverted, most commonly with homosexuality.

5.5 Biblical texts

5.5.1 Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

Introduction

The commandment forbidding homosexual relations between men appears twice in the Old Testament, at Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, within the so-called Holiness Code of chapters 17–26.²⁵ The commands of these chapters in Leviticus call the Israelites to a life of holiness that reflects the holiness of God and demonstrates that they honour the Lord and his holy name (19:2; 20:7,26; 21:6,8).

The life of holiness was believed to result in the health, vitality and stability of the community of Israel (Deut 5:3; Lev 18:5). Conversely it protected the nation from disease and disaster of every kind. A safe and orderly society was achieved by shunning the wicked practices of the surrounding nations, with special reference to the Egyptians from whose land they had been rescued, and the Canaanites whose land they were about to enter (18:3).

Those who adopted the practices of the nations were to be ‘cut off from their people’ (18:29). That is, in most cases, including male homosexual practice, disobedience was regarded as serious enough to warrant the death penalty (e.g. 20:4,9–16). If the offences became too widespread, the land would ‘vomit’ the people out for ‘defiling’ the land (18:28). That is, exile from the land would result.

The laws of Leviticus 18 are in the form of binding (apodictic) commandments, using the same sentence construction as the ten commandments. The laws of Leviticus 20, on the other hand, are in the form of case laws, which focus on the penalties that apply in each situation. Apart from the prohibition of child sacrifice (v 21), the laws in chapter 18 deal

²⁴ Paul could be making a veiled reference to the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, however, when he speaks of the revelation of God’s wrath from heaven, at Romans 1:18 (see Gen 19:24). The men of Sodom did indeed seek to ‘know’ Lot’s visitors (Gen 19:5). See the discussion of Romans 1:18–32 (below).

²⁵ The Holiness Code is the name given to these chapters by commentators. The term itself does not appear in the text, but it is generally agreed that the material is sufficiently different from what precedes and follows to conclude that it consisted of an independent collection prior to the completion of Leviticus. The biblical setting for the laws of Leviticus is the tent of meeting in the wilderness of Sinai. The Lord gave the laws to Moses to give to the people (Lev 1:1). Many scholars propose that the historical setting for the laws is much later in Israel’s history—before, during or after the exile, or even that they were composed over a long period stretching from the seventh to the fifth centuries BC in the light of the threats that the surrounding nations continued to pose to Israel’s identity and existence.

with various forms of prohibited sexual conduct: incest (vv 6–18,20), intercourse during menstruation (v 19), male homosexual intercourse (v 22) and bestiality (v 23).

Sexual relationships approved by God bring life and health (18:5). Leviticus uses the word 'abomination'²⁶ for prohibited relationships (18:22,26,27,29,30; 20:13). Such prohibited relationships were said to lead to the defilement of offenders (18:20,23,30), the defilement of the land itself (18:25,27,28), and ultimately the people's expulsion from the land (18:28; 20:22)—as they had earlier resulted in the defilement and expulsion of the original inhabitants (18:24,25,28). In its reflection on the Leviticus texts and the New Testament texts dealing with homosexuality, the church has a long-standing tradition of asserting that homosexual practice of all kinds is contrary to the will of God; it should be regarded as inherently sinful.

Issues that have arisen

In recent years questions have been raised about the applicability of the Old Testament's prohibition of homosexual practice to the church of today. The concerns fall into various categories.

1. Hebrew shorthand

The Hebrew of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is not easily translated into English. Literally, Leviticus 18:22 reads, 'And with a male you must not lie, lyings (or beds) of a woman'. This reads in most translations: 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman'. The first part of the verse is quite clear, but the phrase, 'lyings (or beds) of a woman', is not clear at first glance. It is invariably translated 'as with a woman', on the undoubtedly correct assumption that the phrase is a case of Hebrew shorthand. On the basis that no mention is made of lesbianism in Leviticus, it has been proposed that the homosexuality in question may refer to men who are 'behaving badly', that is, heterosexual men who are sleeping with men as they normally do with their wives. The text would then be paraphrased: 'You shall not sleep with a male, as you yourself normally do with a woman'.²⁷ The text then refers to men who are experimenting with homosexuality. The little that the writers knew about homosexual behaviour led them to believe that men who slept with other men were simply play acting. The writers knew nothing of homo-erotic attraction or long term and loving homosexual relationships.

2. Procreation and population increase

With the charge to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28) ringing in their ears, Israel was deeply concerned about its low population, especially with hostile neighbours surrounding the nation on every side. Israel would perish if it failed to populate. So homosexuality was taboo because of the threat it posed to population growth.²⁸ This proposal is re-enforced by noting again that the prohibition is addressed to men but not to women. God's blessing on creation, according to the Old Testament, is closely related to fertility, the fertility of the womb and the fertility of the soil. As bearers of semen, men were regarded as the chief channels of blessing, whereas women served only as the receptacles of the seed and contributed nothing to the biological make-up of the child of the womb. Male homosexuality represented the waste of semen, the seed of God's gift of life and population growth. That is why male homosexuality was seen as contrary to the will of God in Israel (see Gen 38:8–10), and that is why only

²⁶ This term is not taken up in the New Testament in relationship to homosexuality and may not be helpful in pastoral conversations on the topic today

²⁷ The precise phrase that appears in the two Leviticus texts does not recur in the OT, but variants on the expression all refer to heterosexual intercourse (e.g. Gen 49:4; Num 31:17,18,35; Judg 21:11,12).

²⁸ See 'Background essay on biblical texts for "Journey together faithfully, part two: the church and homosexuality"', Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Arland J Hultgren and Walter F Taylor Jr, page 7.

male homosexuality is mentioned in the texts of Leviticus. And that is why some would argue that the world's population explosion deprives the text of its full force in the 21st century.

3. Social stability

Together with a concern for Israel's long-term survival, those who compiled the Holiness Code were also vitally concerned about internal social cohesion and stability. In their attempts to get to the bottom of the prohibition of homosexuality in Leviticus, some (e.g. Milgrom: 203,204) have asked why the prohibition is linked with the prohibition of incest and adultery. Could it be that whereas homosexuality prevents procreation and therefore threatened Israel's long term survival, incest and adultery had been seen to upset the cohesion and stability of the household, Israel's present existence as opposed to its long term future? The suggestion is that incest and adultery were abhorrent because of their detrimental effect on a stable social environment. This has to be understood in the context of the practice of polygamy in ancient Israel. It was condoned and widely practised, but it was starting to have a detrimental effect. A head of a household whose relationship(s) had turned sour customarily felt that he had free and ready access to other female members of the household, such as aunts, daughters-in-law, granddaughters, and nieces. It is not hard to imagine the disastrous impact this would have on the dynamics of the household. It was not long before the interests of social cohesion finally dictated that Israel call a halt to incestuous forms of polygamy—but not polygamy as such.

4. The integrity of creation

Behind this societal concern lay a deeper theological concern of the Holiness Code, the integrity of creation. Everything had its place within a divinely ordered universe. Items that were incompatible with one another should not be mingled. The mixing of like and unlike was ruled out. The interbreeding of animals, planting a field with two different kinds of seed, and wearing clothes made of two different materials, were strictly forbidden (Lev 19:19). In terms of sexual relations, on the other hand, the issue was the mixing of like with like. The natural extension of the ban on like with like marriage—that is, marriage between people closely related by blood or marital ties (18:6–18,20)—was the ban on male-male and female-female sexuality. Transgressing sexual boundaries tore at the very fabric of the social order. The health, harmony and good order of society, and by extension the purity of the land, were preserved insofar as reverence was shown for the fixed order of creation in every sphere.

5. Strict legislative reform movement

It is proposed (Milgrom: 203) that the laws of the Holiness Code comprise part of the legislative agenda of a strict moral reform movement in ancient Israel. Moral laxity had set in. That which previously had been tolerated, even permitted, was seen to injure people and harm social cohesion. Earlier, homosexuality barely raised an eyebrow. Incest was practised without censure, even by Abraham (Gen 20:12) and the parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam (Ex 6:20). Jacob's son Judah virtually condoned incest after he had unknowingly lain with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen 38:26). And the other Tamar, daughter of King David, had no doubt that her father would allow her to sleep with her half-brother Amnon, if only they sought his permission (2 Sam 13:13). Furthermore, by marrying Rachel while his first wife Leah was still alive (Gen 29:28), Jacob broke yet another law strictly forbidden by Leviticus (18:18). In due course, it is said, the Holiness Code was formulated with severe new strictures that were intended to halt the rapid slide into moral chaos and social breakdown.

Noting these developments over time in Israel's legal codes, it is argued that they are not set in stone as God's permanent will for all times and places. Rather, they are

equivalent to our own laws of the land that keep evolving as they are adapted to their purpose, of enhancing the general well-being of the community and protecting the people from internal and external threats to peace and prosperity, order and tranquility.

In support of such an argument, it is pointed out²⁹ that some practices of ancient Israel, such as polygamy or capital punishment, are no longer legal or morally acceptable today. On the other hand, practices that are not tolerated in Leviticus, such as sexual intercourse during menstruation (15:24; 18:19) or wearing garments made of two different materials (19:19), no longer meet with universal disapproval. Bearing in mind these developments in legal prescriptions throughout the biblical era and to this present day, it is argued that the same thing should apply in the case of homosexuality. Its widespread tolerance and practice does not have an adverse effect on the health and harmony of the wider community. The removal of discriminatory legislation and the end of stigma and ostracism are seen as positive in their social impact. Taking its cue from legislative developments with the Bible itself, the church should reflect these changes in its statements and practices.

6. Summary

A strict legislative reform movement in ancient Israel stands behind the prohibitions of the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26. Concern for harmonious life within the community ruled out adultery and incestuous forms of polygamy. Concern for the future of the community ruled out homosexuality and child sacrifice. At a deeper level, the Code reveals a priestly concern for a well-ordered life in community and the integrity of creation. Strict taboos governed matters of health, hygiene, agricultural practice, clothing materials, and clearly defined sexual boundaries, and transgression led to uncleanness, impurity and ultimately the disintegration of the social and natural realms if forbidden practices went unchecked. If the church works within this frame of reference today, it is said, consistency dictates that the penalties that are prescribed, even capital punishment, should also be enforced. Those who argue this way would conclude that neither the infractions nor the penalties apply today. They form a package, and they represent the legislation of ancient Israel at a specific time in its history, legislation that kept changing from generation to generation as Israel's legislators introduced laws that were seen as best suited to securing a healthy and disciplined community in a fragile world.

Responses

A specific framework of understanding underpins such perspectives on the Leviticus texts. It is a hermeneutic that depends heavily on hypothetical reconstructions of the circumstances that gave rise to the texts. It depends on a developmental, or evolutionary, understanding of the formation of Israel's law codes. Few would dispute that this is the case, but greater weight is placed on the fluidity of the laws of Israel than their enduring themes. Even if it were granted that features such as population growth, social harmony and the integrity of creation were major considerations in the formulation of the law codes under consideration, deeper concerns about a morality based on the will of God and natural law should not thereby be relativised and marginalised. Another set of hermeneutical starting points leads to another interpretation of the Levitical texts, as follows:

1. Scripture interprets scripture

The New Testament provides important commentary on the texts regarding same sex conduct in Leviticus. These are some examples. Homosexuality is prohibited in the NT,

²⁹ 'Journey together faithfully', page 15.

without the alleged linguistic ambiguity of the verses in Leviticus; and lesbianism is explicitly mentioned at Romans 1:26. Furthermore, Paul was probably referring to Leviticus 18:22 (20:13) when he included 'males who sleep with males' (*arsenokoitai*) among the unrighteous (1 Cor 6:9). And when the leaders of the church gathered at the first Jerusalem conference to decide what should be required of gentiles who came to faith in Christ, they concluded that, among other things, they should abstain from unchastity (*porneia*), a possible allusion to the sexual regulations of Leviticus 18 and 20. On the other hand, the fact that the New Testament does not employ terms used in Leviticus, such as 'abomination' (18:22; 20:13), 'perversion' (18:23), 'to defile' and 'to vomit out' (18:23–30), should caution the church against using such terms in connection with homosexuality today.

2. The rule of faith (*analogia fidei*)

Throughout its history the church has opposed the practice of homosexuality, because of what it regards as the clear biblical teaching on the matter.

3. Permanent prohibitions

The form of wording used for the prohibition is identical with the wording used for the 10 commandments. In each case the prohibitions are not temporary, but permanent. In addition, the formula that introduces the commandments of the Holiness Code, namely, 'I am the Lord your God' (see e.g. Lev 18:4,30; 19:3,4,10,25,31,34; 20:7), is also used to introduce the 10 commandments (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6). Therefore the commandments against male homosexual behaviour have the same weight as the 10 commandments.³⁰

4. Universal prohibitions

It is important to note that the commandments relating to sexual practices in Leviticus 18 and 20 are not addressed only to the people of Israel, but to the whole of humanity. This is clear in the use of the word, *hā'ādām* (humankind), which heads the list of statutes, ordinances and commandments that follow (18:5).

5. Prohibitions observed to this day

Another important consideration is that the prohibition of male homosexual activity is surrounded by sanctions against practices that the nations and religions of the world have shunned, with notable exceptions, from time immemorial, namely child sacrifice, adultery, incest and bestiality. Prohibitions based on natural law are deeply embedded in the human heart. The company the same sex prohibition keeps is a poor advertisement.

6. Shunning the practices of the nations

The matter of shunning the abominable practices of the nations, as witness to a higher standard of morality, is central to the commandment forbidding homosexuality (Lev 18:3; see Matt 5:13–16). In fact, the earlier inhabitants of Canaan were driven from the land for breaching these laws (18:24–30). Shunning the practices of the nations, however, does not mean that the commandment did not apply to the nations. It did, otherwise they wouldn't have been expelled from the land for non-observance, non-observance for which they were renowned.

³⁰ The difference between the two sets of legislation is that the ten commandments arise from the Exodus (Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6) whereas the commandments of the Holiness Code are based on God's holiness.

7. The Bible's teaching on marriage

Marriage and family provide the basis for the sexual morality of the Bible. Made in the image of God, humanity is defined in terms of male and female, who are charged to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:26–28). The polarity of male and female is built into the created order (Gen 2:18–25). The male and the female constitute the two halves of the human sexual whole, and their union in marriage receives the blessing of God. Marriage and the family belong to the orders of God's good creation. God has crafted them for the health, well-being and protection of humankind.

5.5.2 Romans 1:18–32

The most important theological grounds for the Church's stance regarding homosexual behaviour are provided by Romans 1:18–32 and 1 Corinthians 6:11, where Paul bases his admonitions on the doctrines of creation and baptism respectively. The clearest and longest reference to homosexuality in the Bible occurs in Romans chapter 1. As with all Bible study, it is vital to pay close attention to the literary context in which the passage under investigation occurs. Paul concludes his opening greetings to the Gentile Christians in Rome by telling them that he is writing the letter because of his overwhelming eagerness to proclaim the gospel to them. It's as if Paul can't get to the gospel quickly enough, so after the greetings (1:1–15) he immediately foreshadows and summarises the gospel in the very next verses. It is God's power to save those who have faith in Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile alike (1:16,17). Before proclaiming the gospel fully, however, and developing its implications for the lives of believers—from chapter 3:21 to the end of the letter—Paul is at pains to explain the absolute necessity for the gospel. Why is the gospel so essential? Paul demonstrates that apart from the gospel all people—religious Jews and lawless Gentiles alike—are caught up in sin and stand guilty before the judgment throne of God (1:18 – 3:20). Jews know the law, but without exception they fail to keep it (2:17 – 3:8). And by virtue of their creation Gentiles know God in terms of 'his eternal power and divine nature' (1:20), so that the law's requirements are written on their hearts, showing them the difference between right and wrong (2:15). But they too fail to keep the law, as Paul shows, drawing on copious Old Testament references (3:9–20).

Human sinfulness consists first and foremost in the failure to acknowledge God as Creator and Lord, with the result that people become misguided in their thinking and exchange the basic truth about God, given with creation, for a lie (1:18,21,25).³¹ The first step in that process is that humans take centre stage in their own lives; they decide to become controllers of their own destiny. But without knowing it, substitute gods, lesser lords, quickly assume the place left vacant by the one true God. Worship and service of God gives way to slavery to tyrants, and the creatures of this earth, including humans, are elevated to the position of kings and lords worthy of service. God is dethroned, his glorious sovereignty exchanged for the sovereignty and lordship of his human and non-human creatures.

It sounds crude when Paul speaks of worshipping 'images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles' (1:23; see Gen 1:26). But the application is clear. Paul is speaking of the ever-present human tendency to place on a pedestal opinionated leaders, misguided ideologies, material objects of human ingenuity and design, all human pursuits undertaken under the sun, and creature comforts of endless variety. With God cut adrift, humanity tries to steady and steer the ship by yielding ultimate control to other lords. The enlistment of God's creatures as lords of human affairs—this is idolatry pure and simple. This is the original sin. As a universal malady its symptoms afflict everybody on the planet. 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (3:23).

³¹ Verse 25 actually says that 'they exchanged the truth about God for **the** lie', a probable allusion to the serpent's deception of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eve (Gen 3:1–7).

This religious mind-shift manifests itself in a variety of ways. It leads to the degrading of our physical bodies (1:24,25). This could well be applied to the abuse of our bodies through alcoholism, drug-taking, over-eating and general failure to keep our bodies fit and healthy, in addition to the primary accent on sexual misconduct (see also 1 Cor 6:12–20).³² Exchanging God's truth for a lie also leads to a failure to accept the natural God-ordained relationship between men and women (1:26,27), so that men and women choose to exchange heterosexual relationships for homosexual relationships. Paul describes this as 'contrary to nature' (*para physin*).³³ This is not how it was in the beginning. With a clear reference to the first creation account in Genesis (Gen 1:27), Paul uses the words 'females' and 'males' rather than 'women' and 'men' in these verses (Rom 1:26,27), an emphasis not picked up in either the NIV or the NRSV.

So Paul demonstrates that the idolatrous exchange of God's truth for a lie leads to various manifestations of mental disorientation. It leads to the degrading of the body through sexual immorality (1:24,25); it leads to non-compliance with the natural relationship between the sexes (1:26,27); and it leads also to many kinds of vicious human behaviour (1:28–31). What Paul calls 'the works of the flesh' in Galatians (5:19–21,26) he now describes as the conduct of those who fail to acknowledge God (Rom 1:28). The types of behaviour Paul includes in this third listing (verses 28–31) could be categorised as sins of the mind, as opposed to the previous sins, those against the body, especially in the realm of human sexuality. By nature arrogant and boastful lords of their own destiny, people habitually regard others as opponents intent on their demise and hence fair game for envy and rivalry, treachery and thuggery, slander and mischief, and if necessary even violence. It is not an attractive list of behaviours. But it's all of us by nature, even as the Holy Spirit continues to bear good fruit in believers (Gal 5:22–25).

It is important to note, then, that Paul doesn't deal with homosexual practice as a topic for independent investigation and independent denunciation. Rather, it is one of the illustrations he draws on to demonstrate human solidarity in sinful behaviour, which Jew and Gentile alike are to acknowledge and confess, as an essential backdrop to the unprecedented announcement of the gospel.³⁴ Again, it is vital that texts are read in context. Prior to the verses dealing with homosexuality, Paul speaks of bodily abuse in its various forms, and immediately following the verses in question he addresses the human malice of infinite variety that seeks only to tear people down in a spirit of envy, competitiveness and self-seeking. This should give the Church pause as it reflects on its tendency to rail against the evils of homosexuality without devoting the same rigor in its conversations with those who engage in the other practices that Paul refers to in the same setting—those who abuse their bodies, or those who gossip or engage in deceitful business practices or general rabble rousing.

It is widely acknowledged that the central theme of Romans is Paul's announcement of the revelation of God's righteousness to those who have faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1 are often thought of in terms of the text for a sermon, the

³² Paul holds the physical body in high esteem. Our bodies are 'members of Christ' (1 Cor 6:15), each believer's body is 'a temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 6:19), and, in ways that Paul struggles to put into words, our bodies will share in the risen life of our Lord (1 Cor 15:35–57). Paul presupposes the high status our bodies enjoy when he speaks of the way they should be used (Rom 6:12,13; 12:1,2).

³³ It has been argued that when Paul speaks of what is 'natural' and what is 'contrary to nature' he is referring to a person's genetic makeup, so that for some it is their same-sex identity that is 'natural', and it would be 'unnatural' for them to engage in heterosexual relationships. However, the frequent allusions in Romans 1:18–32 to the first creation account in Genesis make it clear that Paul is speaking of God's original design for human sexual relationships. Joseph A Fitzmyer says that Paul employs the word 'nature' to express 'the order intended by the Creator, the order that is manifest in God's creation or, specifically in this case, the order seen in the function of the sexual organs themselves, which were ordained for an expression of love between man and woman and for the procreation of children' (*Romans*, Anchor Bible 33, Doubleday, New York, 1992, page 286).

³⁴ As Brendan Byrne writes: 'In Rom 1:18 – 3:20, Paul is engaged in a long prophetic accusation designed to exclude the possibility of finding a righteous status before God on any basis other than that offered in the gospel: the righteousness of God made accessible through faith' (*Romans*, Sacra Pagina, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 79).

remainder of the epistle. Following hard on the heels of this opening announcement, Paul also announces the revelation of God's wrath against those who suppress the truth through their misguided wickedness (1:18). Does this mean that those who engage in homosexual activity should be subject to the Church's wrath? It is an important and highly relevant question, one that Paul addresses seriously. He does so first by showing how God reveals his wrath against wrongdoers, with the implication that the Church should take a leaf out of God's book. The word that occurs in each of the three major segments of the text is the verb 'to hand over' (*paradidōmi*, vss 24,26,28). Rather than ringing alarm bells or striking offenders with lightning, God reveals his wrath—at least penultimately—by handing people over to their desires, so that their desires can be indulged to the full and take their full effect. This could almost be called divine permissiveness.³⁵ God's judgmental intervention consists of removing his restraining hand and thereby allowing people's sinful conduct to work its destructive effect in their lives.³⁶ If people wish to exercise their liberation from the lordship of the Creator, God lets it be so. God releases his protective hand and lets them fall under the sway of the lords that they have chosen. So, Paul is saying, divine judgment does not consist of active intervention, but active withdrawal, with the result that the preferred lords are free to exert their tyrannical sway, working their destructive effects in various ways. When Paul says that God hands the wicked over to their desires he is not thereby speaking of an act of tolerance or loving forbearance. Rather, it is an expression of God's wrath. It must also be said that the ultimate revelation of God's wrath is reserved for the day of judgment (Rom 2:5,8; 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9).

The Church will bear in mind another vital matter as it reflects on homosexual practice and the pastoral care of those who identify as homosexuals. The matter comes to the fore as Paul moves from Romans 1 to Romans 2. Paul reserves harsh words for those who 'applaud others' for doing the things he has been discussing (1:32). This means those who go beyond engaging in the forbidden practices to condoning them and teaching others how the practices can be justified. Such 'applauding' happens as some bend over backwards to provide support and comfort for fellow members who have experienced hostility and judgment. As Paul is read to this point, those who are prone to judge offenders will be smiling with great satisfaction. His words can be used to support their own words of criticism. But better still, Paul can also be quoted to support their criticism of the defenders and advocates of transgressors. No further encouragement is needed for believers to imagine they have a free hand in denouncing them.

Paul is well aware that people will draw such a conclusion. If condoning a misguided viewpoint and cajoling people into agreeing with it are heinous offences, surely the only fitting response from upright believers is to denounce those who commit such an offence in the strongest possible terms. However, as we have seen, God himself is willing to allow such people to reap the harvest of what they have sown. That itself may alarm us as we absorb the fact. Even more to the point, however, Paul goes to great lengths in chapter 2 to expose the hypocrisy of those whose primary concern is to judge others. In fact, Paul has set a 'rhetorical trap' for his readers, to use Brendan Byrne's expression (*Romans*, 80), a trap that was set in chapter 1 and triggered in chapter 2.³⁷ At the peak of their righteous indignation, people learn with a shock that they are just as guilty as those they have been roundly condemning, if not even more guilty. With one finger pointing accusingly at other

³⁵ See Paul Achtemeier, *Romans*, Interpretation, John Knox Press, Atlanta, GA, 1985. He goes on to say: 'A celebration of life freed from the constraints of the Word of God is therefore a celebration of the visitation of God's wrath upon humankind' (40).

³⁶ Robert Jewett puts it this way: 'Those who choose a dishonest heart are required to live out the life imposed by its twisted desires'. See his essay, 'The social context and implications of homoerotic references in Romans', in David L Balch, editor, *Homosexuality, science, and the 'plain sense' of scripture*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 223–241 (224). In the same volume, Christopher Seitz says that the revelation of God's wrath 'from heaven' could well be an oblique reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with an outpouring of heavenly fire and brimstone (Gen 19:24; see 'Sexuality and scripture's plain sense: the Christian community and the law of God', in *Homosexuality, science, and the 'plain sense' of scripture*, 177–96 (195).

³⁷ The prophet Nathan employs the same trick to trap David into confessing his adultery and murder (2 Sam 12–7), and the prophet Amos employs it to expose the complacent northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 1 and 2).

members of the church, they learn to their dismay that four fingers are pointing even more accusingly at themselves. As Paul tells his readers: 'In passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things' (2:1). It is precisely the attitude of those who fail to understand that they too stand under divine judgment, apart from repentance and faith (2:3). It is the attitude that Jesus speaks against so vehemently in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:1–5) and in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14).

In practice this means that pastoral care givers will not exercise care by means of public statements, letters in parish news-sheets, or sermons, designed to condemn homosexuality. Care will be exercised exclusively through personal conversation with those who are attracted to members of the same sex, and/or with those who are 'applauding' them. And care-givers will pray for a spirit of constructive engagement and avoid any form of harsh condemnation. Prayer for understanding and empathy, deep love and a listening ear, will open up the conversation and enable a free exchange on a difficult matter.

Excursus 1: Did Paul know about 'sexual embodiment'?

Another important matter deserves the full attention of pastors and lay people as the topic of homosexuality is discussed in our circles. The question that recurs in discussions within the church is whether Paul and others of his day appreciated what is known today about sexual embodiment. Was he aware of homosexuality 'as an abiding personal psychological orientation' (Byrne, 70).³⁸ What can be reasonably certain is that the religious and cultural melting-pot in which Paul lived would have made him well aware of homosexual relationships that were 'loving and committed', even though they were the exception rather than the rule. And he probably includes them in his general condemnation of homosexual relationships, not simply those that were abusive, violent or promiscuous.

At the same time, however, the people he actually identifies are people who flagrantly and shamefully engage in homosexual intercourse. It is argued that the word 'exchange' suggests that Paul may be thinking of people whose behaviour is self-chosen, and therefore people who are otherwise heterosexual, at least in some cases.³⁹ The argument continues that Paul is speaking only of godless, destructive and self-seeking behaviour, at the expense of others, lending weight to the case that has been made for saying that Paul may have been thinking primarily of abusive, manipulative or promiscuous homosexual conduct. On the other hand, the reference to female same-sex relationships (1:26), a rarity in the extra-biblical literature of the time, makes it highly improbable that Paul was thinking of pederasty.⁴⁰ Moreover, in using the word 'exchange', Paul is probably not thinking so

³⁸ David L Bartlett writes: 'Paul seems to have little sense that homosexuality may be more a deep-seated orientation than a set of individual choices' (*Romans*, WBC, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 31). Speaking more forcefully, Via writes: 'To limit discussion to acts and rules, to the exclusion of consequences, intentions, and inner dispositions, is a reductionist version of ethical discourse. I note particularly that the exclusive focus on acts has the effect of nullifying the category of character—the gestalt of inner dispositions or the encompassing thrust of the whole self. Persons are reduced to strings of acts—good and bad—and no cognizance is taken of a total ordered self or wholeness to which acts are related' (Via and Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible*, 19).

³⁹ Dan Via goes so far as to say that Paul shared the common belief of his day that everybody was heterosexual, so that those who engaged in homosexual conduct were acting in ways contrary to their nature. 'His (Paul's) implied underlying principle is that if people choose to actualize their sexuality, their acts should be in accord with their nature or orientation. If Paul then could be confronted with the reality of homosexual orientation, consistency would require him to acknowledge the naturalness of homosexual acts for people with a homosexual orientation' (Dan O Via and Robert A J Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: two views*, 2003. Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, 15). Feedback to Via's opinion has been to the effect that (1) he exaggerates the difference between then and now, (2) the fact that Paul doesn't speak of homosexual orientation as such doesn't mean he didn't know of it, (3) it is an unfounded assumption that Paul would have spoken differently about homosexuality if he had been completely au fait with today's understandings, and (4) Greek and Roman literature of Paul's day actually provides ample evidence that the distinction between orientation and conduct was well known, probably also to Paul, even if spoken of in different terms.

⁴⁰ For further comment, see Byrne (*Romans*, 76,77).

much of individuals as of the entire gentile world that has exchanged the true knowledge of God and his creative intentions for a lie, resulting in a host of errors, including the exchange of natural sexual relationships for unnatural ones.

Excursus 2: What did Paul mean by 'natural intercourse?'

An extensive body of literature has arisen that challenges the standard reading of the New Testament texts that address same sex relations.⁴¹ It is beyond the scope of this document to try to interact with each and every proposal that has arisen. However, one that deals specifically with Romans and builds on seminal books⁴² and articles, deserves special attention. It is by David Frederickson of Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, who challenges two of the main assumptions that have been central to the discussion up until recent years.⁴³ First, he claims that at Romans 1:26 and 27 Paul draws mainly on the underlying principles governing sexual affairs current within the Stoic philosophical tradition of his time, not the Old Testament's creation stories. And secondly, he says that the Greek words in verse 26 that have been traditionally translated as 'natural intercourse' (*physisikēn chrēsin*) are more accurately translated as 'natural use'. Fredrickson claims that the words 'desires' (vs 24), 'passions' and 'use'—not intercourse (vs 26), 'inflamed'—not consumed, and 'appetite'—not passion, and 'error' (vs 27) formed part of the standard Stoic vocabulary dealing with Eros, or improper sexual desire. For the Stoics, the natural (or proper) use or practice of the human love impulse was to exercise control, reserve and moderation. This applied to men and women alike, and to homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. Under the influence of this dominant tradition, Frederickson claims, Paul is saying that the boundaries of nature were transgressed when those engaging in sexual activity, 'used' it wrongly by losing control of the emotions and entering a state of ecstatic excitement, or by over-indulging in the practice. 'Their error ... was to exchange normal use for erotic love' (215), writes Fredrickson. Eros took a heavy toll on those who wandered from the true path⁴⁴ and followed the god's cruel seductions, affecting adversely their 'finances, mental equilibrium, and the honor of the lover' (217). Therefore, Frederickson concludes, Paul's concern is not to condemn homosexuality as such, but to speak of the frustrating and destructive effects of succumbing to the charms of Eros, a warning addressed to homosexual and heterosexual lovers alike. That is, beware of an excess of passion.

In response, it has to be said that the references and allusions to Genesis 1:26,27 in Romans 1:18–32 are so many and so clear that it's hard to take seriously the argument made by someone determined to deny the connections, possibly because of prior ideological commitments. The claim that Paul here is drawing on the principles of Stoic philosophy that govern gender relations is also difficult to accept. The overlapping terminology may well reflect the breadth of Paul's exposure to and understanding of the philosophical milieu of his day. But it also reflects his gift for drawing on terminology current in the halls of learning, without importing the baggage that goes with the terminology. That being said, it has been shown⁴⁵ that all the terms Paul uses are widely used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, Paul's primary point of reference. Frederickson also makes a repeated distinction between the person who is the subject of desire and the person who is the object of desire. In various ways the one who desires in excess is said to

⁴¹ Four of the countless books with essays on both sides of the debate are as follows: James M Childs, editor, *Faithful conversation: Christian perspectives on homosexuality*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2003; Dan O Via and Robert A J Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: two views*; David L Balch, editor, *Homosexuality, science, and the 'plain sense' of scripture*; Brian Edgar and Gordon Preece, *Whose homosexuality? Which authority? Homosexual practice, marriage, ordination and the church*, ATF Press, Adelaide, 2006.

⁴² Especially noteworthy are Dale Martin's *Sex and the single Savior: gender and sexuality in biblical interpretation*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY, 2006, and Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and homosexuality: contextual background for the contemporary debate*, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1983.

⁴³ David E Fredrickson, 'Natural and unnatural use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the philosophic critique of Eros', in Balch, ed, *Homosexuality, science, and the 'plain sense' of scripture*, 197–222.

⁴⁴ The word for error is *planē*, from which we get the word planet, a wandering heavenly body.

⁴⁵ For an extensive review of each chapter of *Homosexuality, science, and the 'plain sense' of scripture*, go to <http://www.robqagnon.net/articles/homoBalchHBTReview2.pdf> (accessed 7 February, 2013).

dishonour, denigrate or demean the object of his or her desire. That well may be the case in many instances, and Paul certainly does not hesitate to describe the conduct as inflammatory and excessive. However, the passion that Paul speaks of is mutual and reciprocal, whether shown by men to men, or women to women. And finally, to suggest that Paul's chief concern is excessive passion rather than same-sex relations overlooks the 'plain sense' of verses 26 and 27, to say nothing for the way the passage has been interpreted throughout the history of the church.

5.5.3 1 Corinthians 6:9–11

Context

St Paul mentions same sex relations at 1 Corinthians 6:9 in the context of a far-reaching discussion about the holiness of the church that extends throughout chapters 5 and 6. Three topics are dealt with at length in these two chapters: a case of incest in the church (5:1–8), the incidence of believers seeking justice against one another in civil courts (6:1–11), and the practice of believers continuing to visit prostitutes, as they had done prior to conversion (6:12–20). Paul includes in these two chapters two lists of vices (5:9–11 and 6:9,10), the second almost twice the length of the first through the addition of adulterers, thieves, and two kinds of same sex offenders. The list in which same sex offenders are included follows Paul's detailed and devastating critique of the Corinthians' continuing habit of settling their disputes in the city's law courts.

The basis for all of Paul's admonitions is the new identity that believers have been given through faith in Christ. Speaking of the case of incest, Paul reminds the Corinthians that they have been rescued from their former way of life, their Egyptian slavery to wrongdoing, and they have been set free to celebrate with Christ their Passover lamb, eating the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Part and parcel of the joyful celebration is cleaning out the old leaven of malice and evil (5:6–8). Drawing to an end his words about taking one another to court in civil jurisdictions, Paul says that those who have inherited the kingdom of God have been washed in the waters of baptism: they have been sanctified, that is, made saints and set apart for Christian service; and through faith in Christ and his sacrificial death they have been justified, that is, reconciled to God as a gift of heavenly grace (6:11).

The reason that Paul deals so thoroughly with incest, civil litigation and prostitution is that he has learnt that these are some of the long-term practices that have not yet been thoroughly washed away among the Corinthian church members. The people have not yet fully appreciated the implications of their new identity in Christ; they are not yet living according to their new identity. They have not yet become in practice what they already are through faith (1:2). Failing to see that they should have cleaned out the old leaven of wickedness, they are not simply tolerating a case of incest in their midst but actually boasting about it (5:1,2). Failing to appreciate the implications of becoming members of the body of Christ, some fail to see that union with a prostitute implies adultery in terms of their membership in Christ's body (6:15,16). They even justify their conduct by saying that Christ has set them free from the demands of the law (6:12).

Paul explains why it is totally incongruous that believers should take fellow believers to court.⁴⁶ Airing the church's dirty linen in public is a poor advertisement for the gospel (6:6). More profoundly, however, seeking revenge and redress for wrongdoing, whether real or perceived, is contrary to the Christian principles of forgiveness and reconciliation (6:7; Rom 12:14–21; Matt 5:38–42).

⁴⁶ It should be noted that in Paul's day the members of the judiciary belonged to the ruling elite, including a sprinkling of church members, so the courts were hotbeds of discrimination against those who didn't have the money or connections to receive a just outcome. It is important to read 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 in this light. For an excellent discussion of Roman courts of the first century AD, see Richard B Hays, 1997. *1 Corinthians*, Interpretation, John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, pages 93 and 94.

But even more important than these reasons, Paul again grounds his exhortation in the gospel. The new identity of those who believe in Christ has profound implications for their daily conduct. Paul makes a play on words, based on the common root for the words: 'the unjust' (or 'the unrighteous' or 'wrongdoers', verses 1 and 9), 'to treat unjustly' (or 'to wrong', verses 7 and 8), and 'to be justified' (verse 11). Paul's argument progresses in clear stages. He tells the Corinthians, 'You used to be unjust (*adikoi*, verse 1), but now you have been justified (*edikaiōthēte*, verse 11). Rather than treating one another unjustly (*adikeite*, verse 6), in courts presided over by the unjust (*adikoi*, verse 9), you should be content to be treated unjustly (*adikeisthe*, verse 7). Faith in Christ transfers believers from the realm of the unrighteous to the realm of the righteous, from the realm of the unjust to the realm of the justified. It follows that it should also transfer believers from the realm of the unjust Roman legal system to the realm of God's covenant community. If brothers and sisters in the family of God have grievances with one another they should settle them within the church, where totally different codes of conduct apply.⁴⁷ The preferred course of action, however, is for believers simply to allow themselves to be wronged in imitation of Christ's example of non-retaliation.

Paul's list of vices

Ten kinds of people are listed in Paul's vice list (1 Cor 6:9,10). A common way of dividing them is into two groups of five. They are 'immoral persons, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers' (NRSV). The first group of five consists of people engaged in sexual wrongdoing, two kinds of same sex conduct, two kinds of wrongful male-female conduct, and idolatry.⁴⁸ The second group, starting with thieves, consists of people whose one concern is self-advancement, through self-indulgence, violence, exploitation or the manipulation of others. The entire list is connected by a common thread, the desire of people to advance or indulge themselves at the expense of others, through the improper pursuit of power, property, status, or sexual and sensual gratification.

Regarding these vices, however, Paul asserts clearly: 'This is what some of you used to be' (verse 11). The washing has done its work. The transfer from the former life to the life in Christ has been completed.⁴⁹ But he warns the Corinthians in the strongest possible terms not to lapse back into the practices that some of them were engaged in previously. Certainly, not all of those who joined the church came from the ranks of the immoral. There would have been a good number of upright Gentiles and faithful Jews among them. Even so, Paul knew, a handful of new converts would always be tempted to conclude that being freed from the law as the means of salvation meant that they could now do as they pleased. The appeal of the case that such people made led Paul to call

⁴⁷ In verse 5 Paul also takes a dig at the Corinthians for their supposed wisdom (1:19–25; 2:1–5; 3:18–20). If they were as wise as they made out, surely they could easily settle their differences within their own circles.

⁴⁸ Including idolaters among the first group of wrongdoers seems out of place at first glance. But in the Old Testament, Israel's idolatry is portrayed as a wife's adulterous abandonment of her husband; frequently it is portrayed as harlotry (eg, Ezek 16; Hos 1–3). And in Romans 1, as shown in the previous section of this document, one of the symptoms of idolatry—the misguided exchange of the truth about God for a lie—is the exchange of natural male-female sexual relations for same sex relations (Rom 1:26,27). So if idolatry is portrayed in terms of Israel's adultery against the Lord God in the Old Testament, Paul extends the analogy by showing that human idolatry manifests itself in the actual practice of a vast array of irregular sexual activities. Therefore it stands to reason that idolatry should take its place also in the vice list of 1 Corinthians 6, among those forbidden activities.

⁴⁹ The new way of life for baptised believers is a common theme for Paul (see especially Rom 6:1–4). It is ironic, therefore, that many who call on the church to revise its stance on homosexual conduct take baptism as their starting point. For a clear example, see Martha Ellen Stortz, 'Rethinking Christian sexuality: baptized into the body of Christ', in *Faithful conversation*, 59–79. Stortz writes: 'Beginning with baptism does not endorse either homosexual or heterosexual "lifestyles." The only lifestyle a Christian should be concerned with is the lifestyle of discipleship, which is shaped by the "one flesh" union Christians have with Christ. Baptism seals that union, and the primary membership in the body of Christ informs all others. Christians who have been given that rare gift of celibacy exercise their discipleship in ways that make their union with Christ a sole and exclusive option. Others will exercise their discipleship in relationships that conform to that "most perfect marriage" they enjoy through baptism in the body of Christ' (73).

on the church not to associate with them, even to remove them from the community (5:2,5,7,9,11,13).⁵⁰ He even went so far as to issue a warning, to the effect that 'wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God', inserted both before and after the catalogue of vices (verses 9 and 10). Paul believed that even the justified could endanger their salvation by wilfully indulging the desires of the flesh (Rom 8:13; Gal 6:8). On the other hand Anthony Thiselton says that Paul is not for a minute suggesting 'that moral failure disinherits a Christian from salvation; otherwise the themes of forgiveness and justification by grace alone would lose their currency'.⁵¹ Instead,

Paul warns his readers that wilfully to practice evil without resolve to change casts suspicion on the genuineness of a professed commitment to follow Christ. The Christian will look ahead to the new creation and God's kingdom; not behind, to the sins from which deliverance has in principle been granted. (Thiselton: 90)

The two words that Paul uses for same sex conduct

Paul does not define the two words that he uses for same sex conduct, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, with the result that they have become the subject of intense study and extensive speculation in recent years. The most common assumption is that the words act as a pair and refer to the passive and active partners in same sex relationships. The word *malakoi* is a plural noun based on the adjective *malakos*, which means soft. A soft tongue is mentioned at Proverbs 25:15 (LXX), and soft robes at Matthew 11:8. Literally, *malakoi* means 'soft ones', so the best guess is that Paul has in mind the passive partner in a same sex relationship; namely, a catamite (so the Jerusalem Bible). *Arsenokoitēs* is a word that occurs only at 1 Corinthians 6:9 and at 1 Timothy 1:10. Hultgren and Taylor summarise what can be known about the word as follows:

Discerning the meaning of the word *arsenokoitēs* is particularly difficult, since it does not exist in any known sources prior to Paul's own use. Various interpreters have sought to get at its most likely linguistic origins and meaning. In recent scholarship there appears to be a consensus that the term was coined—either by Paul or within Hellenistic Judaism before him—from the words 'male' (*arsēn*) and 'bed' (*koitē*) that appear in each of the two [pertinent] Leviticus verses in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint). In Leviticus 18:22 two words separate the pair, but in 20:13 the two words occur next to each other [*meta arsenos koitēn*]. When Paul wrote I Corinthians 6:9, therefore, he coined a term—or picked up a current term—that has its background in reflection on those passages in Leviticus. Thus he appears to presuppose the ongoing relevance of the Leviticus passages, giving them an application to what he has observed in his own time.⁵²

Included among the ways that *arsenokoitai* has been translated are: 'abusers of themselves with mankind' (KJV), 'the pervert' (J B Phillips), 'homosexual offenders' (NIV), and 'sodomites' (NRSV,JB). With no attempt to distinguish between the meanings of the two words, three Bible versions run them together using highly emotive terms such as 'those guilty of homosexual perversion' (NEB), 'sexual perverts' (RSV), and 'homosexual perverts' (GNB). But, as shown above, most translations think of the words as a pair, dealing with the passive and active partners in same sex relations.

Summary

In summary, it is readily acknowledged that the two words that have been the focus of attention have been the cause of considerable controversy in the scholarly literature. What is clear is that they indicate types of behaviour that Paul believes belong to the Gentile past of some members, but by no means the majority of those who entered the church, so that same-sex conduct isn't dealt with at length, unlike incest, civil litigation and visiting the local brothel. On the other hand, same sex conduct is clearly in view, especially in relation to the word, *arsenokoitai*, which is made up from the words for male (*arsēn*) and the word for bed (*koitē*), reflecting Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in the Septuagint. 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 have to do with the holiness of God's people, made holy through the

⁵⁰ Paul is also conscious of the spiritual risks associated with harsh churchly discipline (2 Cor 4:5–11).

⁵¹ *1 Corinthians: a shorter exegetical and pastoral commentary*, 2006. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

⁵² Hultgren and Taylor, 15.

waters of baptism that have transferred believers from a life conformed to the ways of the world to a life transformed by their new identity, a life marked by change and renewal, by healing and discipline.

5.5.4 1 Timothy 1:8–11

This passage needs to be considered alongside 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, which, as we have seen (above), contains a similar catalogue of sinners and their vices. In comparing the two passages, it should be borne in mind that the church situation addressed in the Pastorals is both later and different from that of the young Corinthian congregation to which Paul wrote from Ephesus in the 50s.

The Text (RSV)⁵³

- [8] Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully,
[9] understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,
[10] immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,
[11] in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

The problem of false teachers, a major concern of this letter, is taken up immediately after the address and salutation. Timothy is to 'instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith' (1:3,4). A probable aspect of their speculative, gnostic kind of teaching is their attitude to the law, of which they desire 'to be teachers ... without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions' (verse 7).

v8

Against such a misguided, probably antinomian, abuse of the law, Paul defends the **law** as **good, if one uses it lawfully** (NRSV: 'legitimately').

v9-10

The law is used lawfully when it is understood that **the law is laid down not for the just** [*dikaioi*], **but for the lawless** [*anomoí*] **and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners** etc. This accords well with Paul's teaching in Romans 7, where he says that while 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good' (verse 12), people are not, and thus the real task of the law is to expose sin: 'If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin' (verse 7). Similarly in Galatians chapter 3: Why do we have the law? 'It was added because of transgression. Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith' (verses 19,23,24).

The catalogue of sinners moves from the more general—the **lawless, disobedient, ungodly, sinners**—to more specific types of wrongdoers: the law is laid down for **the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers** etc. It is, however, not just from more general to more specific, but as some have noticed,⁵⁴ the sequence generally follows the Decalogue. Thus those denounced in 1:9,10 are not just **lawless and disobedient** in a general sense, but persons who break the Ten Commandments:

ungodly and sinners	Ex 20:2	1 st commandment
unholy and profane	Ex 20:7	2 nd commandment
parent killers	Ex 20:12	4 th commandment

⁵³ The RSV translation has been chosen for the sake of its greater accuracy.

⁵⁴ Eg, Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, 1977. *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans P Buttolph and Adele Yarbro, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 23.

murderers	Ex 20:13	5 th commandment
immoral persons, sodomites	Ex 20:14	6 th commandment
kidnappers	Ex 20:15	7 th commandment
liars, perjurers	Ex 20:16	8 th commandment

Before the modern issue of homosexuality came to the fore, there seemed to be a consensus on the translation of the three disputed words at the beginning of verse 10, *pornoi*, *arsenokoitēs*, *andrapodistai*. In the old KJV the translation is: 'for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers'. In the RSV that was updated, with no significant change of meaning, to 'immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers'. This was left unchanged in the NRSV, even though by that time (1989) significant alternative translations were on offer.

The literature that includes discussion of 1 Timothy 1:9,10 is almost overwhelming. The task is made a little easier by the fact that some of the writers give good summaries of the debate thus far.⁵⁵ Interpretations can be divided into two groups, with different nuances within the two groups. There are those who follow the traditional translation, and there are those who nuance the translation so that what is condemned, especially with respect to the word *arsenokoitēs*, is a particular kind of same-gender sexual activity.

Let us look at the three words:

Pornoi is best translated as **sexually immoral persons** because in the literature it is mostly used in the general sense. Paul certainly uses the word *porneia* with that understanding: 'The body is meant not for *porneia* but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Shun *porneia*! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the *porneuōn* ('the fornicator', NRSV; 'he who sins sexually', NIV) sins against the body itself' (1 Cor 6:13,18). The particular form of *porneia* that Paul is dealing with in 1 Corinthians 6 is taking 'members of Christ' and making them members of a female prostitute, becoming one body with her (verses 15,16). Paul implies that all sexual activity outside of marriage is *porneia*: 'Because of *porneia* let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband' (1 Cor 7:2).

The word *arsenokoitēs* (plural: *arsenokoitai*) is a word that occurs only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and here at 1 Timothy 1:10.⁵⁶ The problem is how to translate the word. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 it is coupled with *malakoi*, and in that case Paul could be using two terms as a pair to speak of the passive and active partners in a male same-gender sexual encounter. In 1 Timothy the word is uncoupled and thus a more general meaning seems warranted: 'sodomites' (NRSV), or 'same-sex fornicators'.

'Practising homosexuals' has also been given as a translation.⁵⁷ This may seem to be adequate, but on further reflection one has to conclude that it is not, because the writer is providing a catalogue of sinners and their vices, and the focus is on their deeds, not their sexual orientation. It may be anachronistic to use the word 'homosexual' in translating words in New Testament texts because 'homosexual' is a modern word and implies an understanding of sexuality that people in the 1st century may not have had.⁵⁸ That doesn't mean for a minute that the Bible doesn't have things to say about sexual relationships between persons of the same gender.

⁵⁵ The essay by Hultgren and Taylor is a good place to start.

⁵⁶ The extensive discussion in the previous section, on 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, need not be repeated here. However, it may be added that Luther translated *arsenokoitai* as 'Knabenschänder', for which the literal English translation is 'violators of young boys'.

⁵⁷ Eg, NAB 2nd ed; also Raymond F Collins, 2002. *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: a commentary*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 33.

⁵⁸ Hultgren and Taylor, 17.

A second reason is that, given the Decalogue-shaped framework behind the catalogue of sinners and their vices, and given the range of permissive sexual activity that was practised in the Graeco-Roman world, it could well be that the word *arsenokoitai* includes also married men who are playing around with each other or even using male prostitutes (Scroggs *et al*). Such men are flagrantly breaking the commandment against adultery and indulging in forbidden relationships. At the very least we cannot limit the application of the word to persons whom today we would call active homosexuals; but it does of course include them.

We need to read Paul from his Jewish background to understand the condemnations in our text. Raymond Collins summarises well:

Jewish men were enjoined from having sexual relations with other men as part of the strict code of sexual mores that distinguished Jewish men from Egyptians and Canaanites.... Paul shared the traditional Jewish view that acts of homosexuality among men were the result of idolatry (Rom 1:19–27; 1 Cor 6:9). For Jews, such sexual activity was deemed to be a particularly egregious form of sexual immorality. It violated the principle of demarcation that pervaded the traditional ethos, Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, male and female. Jews were expected to act like Jews, men were expected to act like men, and so forth.⁵⁹

Andrapodistai is translated as ‘menstealers’ in the KJV, and that is literally what the word means. So here we are talking about kidnappers, and in the ancient world the primary reason for stealing people was to sell them into slavery. Thus some modern translations read ‘slave traders’ (eg, NRSV).

As already noted, it is important that people be alert to a range of less traditional ways of reading this text. Many scholars interpret 1 Timothy 1:8–11 in such a way that what is condemned is not same-gender sexual relationships in general, but only certain kinds of male same-gender activity. One such interpretation is that *arsenokoitai* are men who use pubescent boys; in other words, the men are pederasts.⁶⁰

Summary

In contrast to the teaching of the false teachers, the law is to be used lawfully. The law is laid down to condemn the lawless and disobedient. The lawless are those who flagrantly break the law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. Among those on the list of the lawless are those who break the sixth commandment. Turning away from a life of fidelity in marriage, some people are flagrantly sexually immoral and some men commit sexual acts with each other. ‘Whatever the specific meanings of *pornoi* and *arsenokoitai*, they are together considered persons who break the commandment against adultery—whether that means they break the marriage vow or, by extension, are unchaste.’⁶¹ This seems to be the most likely interpretation of the text.

5.6 Rereading the texts and the tradition

The steady stream of books and journal articles written by people eager to demonstrate that Paul does not oppose committed same sex relationships, if indeed he was even aware of them, shows no sign of abating. The claims take one of two forms. Either Paul was ignorant of the full range of homosexual behaviour, so he only has in mind highly problematic manifestations, such as pederasty or same sex prostitution. Or he isn’t thinking of same sex behaviour at all, and the terms he uses (esp *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) have been consistently misunderstood in the church.

⁵⁹ Collins, 33.

⁶⁰ See the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:9 (above) where the *malakoi* would then be effeminate boys.

⁶¹ Hultgren and Taylor, 17.

Robin Scroggs

The first of these approaches is taken by Robin Scroggs, New Testament professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Assuming that Paul knew very little about male sexual intimacy, Scroggs⁶² has developed the proposal that Paul was thinking exclusively of abusive pederasty, the sexual violation of boys, the *malakoi* (or at 1 Tim the *pornoi*) being the victims and the *arsenokoitai* the perpetrators.⁶³ He says that the New Testament church was not overly concerned about same sex matters, given that no New Testament writer expands on the topic and only one verse is devoted to lesbianism. Not only is pederasty the only same sex issue that is addressed in the three New Testament vice lists, Scroggs claims, but it is a particularly violent form of pederasty, perpetrated also by male heterosexuals and slave prostitutes. In the opinion of Scroggs, Paul knew nothing of loving and committed homosexual relationships, so the texts do not address today's questions.⁶⁴

Scroggs develops his proposal in some detail in his discussion of 1 Timothy 1:10, where he argues that the three disputed words at the beginning of the verse are to be taken together. The kidnappers (*andrapodistai*) are not just slave traders, but slave dealers who sell enslaved boys into prostitution. The boys then become *pornoi*—enslaved young male prostitutes. The *arsenokoitai* are the men who pay to use the boys. Scroggs writes:

The three words [of v 10] would thus fit together and could be translated: "male prostitutes, males who lie [with them], and slave dealers [who procure them]."
I thus draw the conclusion [continues Scroggs] that the vice list in 1 Timothy is not condemnatory of homosexuality in general, not even pederasty in general, but that specific form of pederasty which consisted of the enslaving of boys or youths for sexual purposes, and the use of them by adult males. Perhaps the effeminate call-boy is also included in the condemnation, but I see no way of making a judgment on the matter.⁶⁵

Scroggs' reconstruction of the background does not stand the test of critical scrutiny. As ingenious as his interpretation is, it is based on conjecture rather than compelling evidence from word usage in antiquity. Furthermore, the *malakoi* (1 Cor 6:9) and the *pornoi* (1 Tim 1:10) could scarcely be regarded as wrongdoers and lawbreakers according to his scenario. For Scroggs they were hapless victims of the slave traders.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the picture he paints presupposes an extremely limited and one-dimensional understanding of same-sex behaviour on Paul's part, a notion probably far from the truth, given the cosmopolitan world he lived in. As Thiselton asserts, 'Paul witnessed around him both abusive relationships of power or money and examples of "genuine love" between males. We must not misunderstand Paul's "worldly knowledge"'.⁶⁷ More significantly, however, Scroggs fails to take seriously the theological presuppositions involved in Paul's discussion of the matter—the theology of creation (especially in relation to Romans 1:18–32) and

⁶² *The New Testament and homosexuality*.

⁶³ Perhaps surprisingly, Luther understood the word *arsenokoitai* in this way. He translated the word as 'Knabenschänder' (violators of boys), and recent revisions of the *Lutherbibel* have left that unchanged. Some German New Testament scholars follow suit.

⁶⁴ Thiselton disagrees forcefully with this oft-repeated opinion: 'The claims often made [that homosexuality as a psychosexual orientation is simply not a biblical issue] are confused. Paul addresses every form of "desire," whether heterosexual or materialistic, and distinguishes between passionate longing and action (cf. 7:9)', Anthony C Thiselton, 2000. *The first epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 452.

⁶⁵ *The New Testament and homosexuality*, 120, 121. Another interpretation also involves prostitution, but in this version of the argument it is not the *pornoi* who are the male-prostitutes, but the *arsenokoitai*. See David F Wright, 1984. 'Homosexuals or prostitutes? The meaning of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10)', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38: 125–153. Wright, who favours the interpretation that the word means 'homosexuals', argues strongly against Professor John Boswell, formerly professor of history at Yale, whose position is that 'male sexual agents, i.e., active male prostitutes' are meant (125).

⁶⁶ According to another recurring proposal the *malakoi* and *pornoi* were, as Scroggs suggests, call boys or male prostitutes, but, contrary to Scroggs, they are not to be thought of as servile victims of cruel exploitation, given their inclusion in lists of wrongdoers. If they were prostitutes they would have been remunerated, and if call boys they may have even enjoyed their calling. This interpretation is reflected in the NIV and NRSV.

⁶⁷ Thiselton, 2000, page 452.

baptismal theology (especially in relation to 1 Corinthians 6:9)—and the dependence of the 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy texts on Leviticus.

Dale Martin

Dale B Martin⁶⁸ provides a good example of those who say that the New Testament texts do not necessarily refer to people who engage in same sex conduct. The compound word *arsenokoitai* may well consist of more than the sum of its parts, he says. Does it have to refer to men having sex with men, simply because the compound word is made up from the words for male and bed?⁶⁹ Martin says that the way the term is used in contemporary literature, such as the Sybilline Oracles, suggests that it refers to people who exploit the poor for economic gain, possibly a pimp who procures male sex partners for wealthy associates. Similarly, the *malakoi* are not necessarily same-sex attracted, but those who are weak and cowardly, or gentle and non-assertive, more like women than men. From his survey of the *malakoi* in ancient Graeco-Roman society, Martin concludes that they were softies, people one might call dandies or sissies, who led a decadent lifestyle. 'They drink too much wine, have too much sex, love gourmet food, and hire professional cooks' (45), and finally, 'the word *malakos* refers to the entire ancient complex of the devaluation of the feminine' (47). This take on the word is at least implied by Bible versions that translate *malakoi* as 'the effeminate' (see KJV and J B Phillips). However, if this was Paul's understanding, once again the *malakoi* would scarcely be contenders for a list of wrongdoers unfit for the kingdom.

Dan O Via

The most challenging questions for the LCA will not arise from such quarters as these, however, but from people like Dan O Via.⁷⁰ Although he confronts the tradition just as vigorously, Via follows a different route altogether, one with which most Christians today will be familiar; or, if they are not, they well may resonate with it very quickly. While Scroggs and Martin represent those who reinterpret the pertinent texts by studying the key words in the light of various reconstructions of society at the time of the New Testament, Via reframes the issue within the context of a number of broad principles arising, as he says, from scripture, reason (science) and experience. His presuppositions are apparent in the question that he starts with.

What does the creative and redemptive purpose of God and the ethic of love tell the church its posture should be toward homosexual practice—assuming that the relationship is loving, consensual, non-manipulative, and faithful? (29)

Via concludes from Jesus' offer of an abundant life (John 10:10) that the church should not withhold an 'abundant bodily life for the homosexual since homosexual orientation is the destiny he/she has been given' (36). Furthermore, in keeping with (a) Jesus' commandment to love the neighbour, (2) the desire of believers to say and do whatever promotes the welfare of the other, and (3) the experience of loving homosexual couples who do nothing but good for one another, Via asks:

Do we have strong reason to believe that partners in a loving, mutual, homosexual couple are harming each other by homosexual practice, or are they contributing to each other's well-being? When the church, in its traditional stance, condemns such people, are we seeking their good or are we harming them and seeking to conceal our own internal insecurities from ourselves?

Again, it is beyond the scope of this document to provide a thorough analysis of Via's thesis. Robert Gagnon does so in the same volume (41–92 and 99–105). Most clearly, however, Via fails to carry out a thorough exegesis of the texts in question, he equates love

⁶⁸ See 'Arsenokoitēs and Malakos: meanings and consequences', in *Sex and the single Saviour*, 37–50.

⁶⁹ To support his case, Martin uses the example of the word 'understand'. It does not literally mean 'to stand under', even though it comprises those two words.

⁷⁰ Dan O Via and Robert A J Gagnon, 2003. *Homosexuality and the Bible: two views*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

with tolerance, he bypasses the first commandment that Jesus speaks of, that his followers love God, which surely also implies seeking to know and do his will, and he assumes that the only course open to those who want to love their homosexual neighbour is by non-judgmental acceptance of homosexual conduct. Finally, Via believes that 'in the light of contemporary knowledge and experience, we can justifiably override the unconditional biblical condemnations of homosexual practice' (38). This approach is at variance with the LCA's confession of the normative status of the Bible.

5.7 Conclusion and pastoral care

Pastors and other pastoral caregivers will commit themselves whole-heartedly to the care of members and friends of the congregation who identify as homosexuals. They will do so first of all by upholding their God-given identity as people who are made in God's image and as co-heirs with Christ through the gospel. They will help people to remember that it is their relationship with God, rather than their sexuality, that is the basis of their identity. At the same time, they will not shirk the biblical testimony that homosexual acts are forbidden by the Bible, based on the creation of humans as male and female (Rom 1:26,27) and their new creation in baptism (1 Cor 6:11). With this always in mind, caregivers will nevertheless continually seek to follow the example of Jesus in his dealing with people in conflicted circumstances during his earthly ministry. They will think of Jesus' dealings with those who experienced ostracism from their community. Who knows what Jesus said to Zacchaeus during their shared meal to effect such a change in the tax collector? But there is no doubt that Zacchaeus went away a changed man (Luke 19:1-10). They will think of Jesus' dealings with those who have committed sexual offences; for example, the woman caught in adultery. Jesus refused to join those who condemned her but instead called on anyone who was without sin to cast the first stone. Left alone with her after her critics had slunk away in guilty silence, Jesus declared her absolved and called on her to go and sin no more (John 8:2-11). Far from assigning blame and making judgments in the complex realities of people's lives, pastoral caregivers will bear in mind what Jesus did when his disciples sought to assign blame in relation to the man born blind. Jesus not only refused to assign blame, but he saw the situation as an opportunity for the work of God to be displayed in the man's life (John 9:1-3). Caregivers will also think of Jesus' dealings with those who wanted to soften the law's hard edge. When the Pharisees tried to commit Jesus to a more open stance on divorce, Jesus told them that the divorce legislation of Deuteronomy was to be understood as a concession to human hard-heartedness, and he directed their attention back to God's original plan for marriage, given with the creation of the world (Matt 19:1-9).

A major responsibility of pastoral caregivers is to intercede for those in their care. In their prayers they will honour the status of Christians who experience same-sex desire as true brothers and sisters in Christ. They will welcome honest conversation about the realities of their lives, listening compassionately to what they say. This is important as people in this situation may experience an inner conflict between their possible self-identification as homosexuals, and the teaching of the scriptures. They may also have experienced overt or covert discrimination, and so have deep feelings of isolation or rejection. Pastoral caregivers will understand that there is no temptation to sin that is not common to everyone, and that God, who is faithful, will not let anyone be tempted beyond their strength, but will with the testing provide a way out, so that those who are tested may endure it (1 Cor 10:13). In their praying, caregivers will be creative in thinking of specific things to ask of God on behalf of those with whom they are in conversation. This could include asking God to protect them from occasions for sin, to give them discernment, to provide them with friendships in which the fruits of the Spirit are evident, and to give them a desire for sexual purity in their thinking, speaking, and acting.

Another responsibility is to teach clearly the biblical teaching on same sex relationships and to urge those who identify as homosexual to turn away from sexual immorality. This means that those who provide pastoral care are obliged to advocate a disciplined

Christian life, especially in the area of sexual conduct. This is a vital component of proper soul-care. The teaching will be based on the Bible, trusting that God's word will do its work. The teaching will aim at bringing Christ into focus as the one who receives sinners in mercy. The teaching will humbly acknowledge that all have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and it will serve to encourage Christians who identify as homosexual to acknowledge that their primary identity is that of heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ Jesus. The chief responsibility that pastoral carers have is to be people who declare the forgiveness of sins. This is particularly important, because the Spirit-filled absolution has power for transformation that no amount of moral teaching can give. Indeed, the teaching of the scriptures regarding the sinfulness of homosexual acts only finally makes sense in the light of the grace and mercy of God.

Paul knows that hearts are not changed by sideways glances and critical words. In our pastoral dealings with those whose perspective the Church believes is wrong, Paul would urge us to adopt as our blueprint for action the example provided by God himself, as the apostle poses the question: 'Do you despise the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?' (2:4). It is self-understood that this does not imply for a moment that the topic should be avoided in our care for the people in question. Given Paul's portrayal of sin as a tyrannical master whose slaves are led to their inevitable death (6:16), a word simply must be spoken to those caught in its thrall. This will be our message, spoken in love and kindness and patience: 'Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness' (6:13).

As has been demonstrated,⁷¹ a proportion of Christians who identify as homosexual and their supporters have reached the conclusion that same sex activity can be justified, biblically and morally. In most cases they have read widely, thought deeply and discussed the matter at great length. As a result they have become increasingly firm in their conviction. This is acknowledged as a major pastoral issue. In such circumstances, pastoral caregivers will trust and pray that patience and compassion and the love and support of the community will open ears to receive the fullness of God's word, and that God will work his healing and peace. In such circumstances, the Church will urge those who maintain this stance to order their lives as well as possible according to reason, even as the Church continues to bring the whole counsel of God.

The innate resistance to addressing the difficult pastoral dimensions of appropriate sexual conduct is a factor to be reckoned with in the life of the contemporary church. It is vital that the church learn once more to take that fraught but necessary path, pioneered by Jesus. However, such pastoral care should always be conducted as believer to fellow believer, as friend to friend, far removed from prying eyes. Pastoral care of homosexual members of the congregation is never done by condemning it from the pulpit or by holding congregation-wide meetings on the topic, even if some members may urge the pastor to do so.

Jesus worked with sinners one on one. It does not matter what people may think. Those who saw how closely Jesus identified with the outcasts of his day readily concluded that he condoned their conduct. When he was nailed to the cross between two bandits, he made no attempt to dissociate himself from them. Bystanders would have assumed he was as guilty and deserving of death as the two criminals. Jesus' unconditional solidarity with sinful humanity is truly exemplary. At the same time it never dissolved into a wishy washy tolerance of sin. In the words of St Paul: 'My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of

⁷¹ See above, 'Being single and homosexuality', pages 15,16; 'Excursus 1 and 2', pages 30-32; and 'Rereading the texts and the tradition', pages 37-40.

gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal 6:1,2).

Pastoral caregivers of homosexual Christians also have the responsibility to understand their need for social engagement. It is important that they be encouraged to mix freely with those who are not attracted to members of the same sex, join various support groups, and use the services of Christian psychologists or psychiatrists, where appropriate. Family members, friends, fellow believers and caregivers will give homosexuals love and support in their faith journey and urge them to attend church regularly, make confession, receive absolution and partake of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

This three-part study document is presented with the prayer that it will contribute to a loving and respectful conversation under the authority of God's word. We hope that it will serve the Church as together we listen to this word, with the prayer that the Spirit would transform our personal and corporate lives to the glory of God.